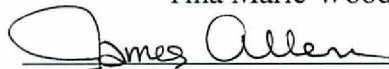



A COMPARISON BETWEEN TALKING CIRCLES AND
MAINSTREAM STUDENT SUPPORT GROUPS FOR COLLEGE LIFE
ADJUSTMENT WITH ALASKA NATIVE STUDENTS

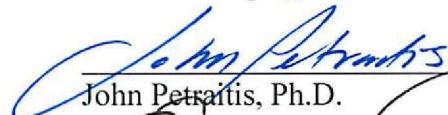
By


Tina Marie Woods


RECOMMENDED:



James Allen, Ph.D.


Claudia Lampman, Ph.D.

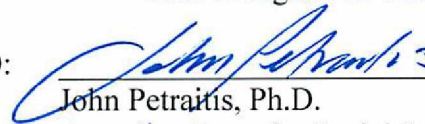

John Petraitis, Ph.D.

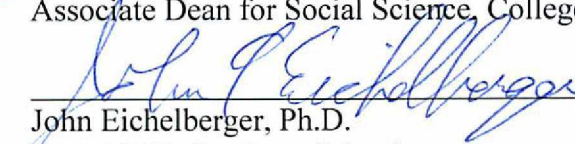

E.J.R. David, Ph.D., Advisory Committee Chair



James Fitterling, Ph.D., UAA Program Director
Ph.D. Program in Clinical-Community Psychology

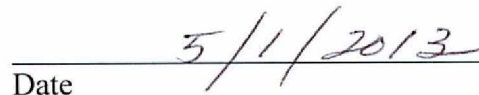

David Webster, Ph.D., UAF Program Director
Ph.D. Program in Clinical-Community Psychology

APPROVED:


John Petraitis, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Social Science, College of Arts and Sciences


John Eichelberger, Ph.D.
Dean UAF, Graduate School


Helena S. Wisniewski, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Studies
Dean UAA, Graduate School


Date

A COMPARISON BETWEEN TALKING CIRCLES AND
MAINSTREAM STUDENT SUPPORT GROUPS FOR COLLEGE LIFE
ADJUSTMENT WITH ALASKA NATIVE STUDENTS

A
DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Anchorage and University of Alaska Fairbanks

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Tina Marie Woods, M.S.

Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska

May 2013

Abstract

Alaska Native college students are less likely to graduate within a four year time span, have higher drop-out rates, and have lower grade point averages compared to other students. In addition to the typical life adjustments, challenges, and stressors that come along with college life, Alaska Native college students also commonly face conflicts between their heritage culture and the Westernized systems of colleges and universities, which might make it more difficult for Alaska Native college students to successfully adjust to college life, perform well academically, and remain committed to completing their education. Thus, this study used an experimental design to compare two similar student support groups (Talking Circles or TC and Mainstream Support Groups or MSG) that were administered during an academic semester to determine which works better with Alaska Native college students for facilitating their adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing college. Using an experimental, pre-/post-test comparison group design with 24 Alaska Native college students (TC $n=10$; MSG $n=14$), the results revealed that neither TCs nor MSGs increased levels of adjustment to college life and commitment to completing college. Furthermore, although the results showed that students who participated in TCs felt more satisfied and felt that they were heard better by their group compared to students in the MSGs, no evidence was found to support the effectiveness of TCs in improving adjustment to college life, academic success, and commitment to college. Along with the study limitations, future research and service implications regarding the use of TCs among Alaska Native college students – and among Alaska Native Peoples more generally – are discussed.

Table of Contents

	Page
Signature Page	i
Title Page	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	viii
List of Tables	ix
List of Appendices	x
Acknowledgements	xi
Dedication	xiii
Chapter One Introduction	1
A Focus on Alaska Native College Students	2
The Potential of Talking Circles in Facilitating Adjustment to College Life	5
Study Aims and Significance	7
Overview of Dissertation	8
Chapter Two Background and Significance	10
Overview of Alaska Native Culture and History	10
Contemporary Experiences of Psychological Distress and Historical Trauma	11
Pilot Study: The Talking Circle	16

	Page
The Talking Circle Process.....	16
The Talking Circle Practice and History in Alaska	19
The Talking Circle as Practiced by Various Groups in Various Contexts	21
The Talking/Healing Circles with Other Indigenous Groups of the North	21
Circles for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking	22
Talking Circles and Mainstream Support Groups	26
A Comparison between Talking Circles and Mainstream Support Groups.....	27
Small Steps: A Focus on Alaska Native College Students.....	30
Adjustment to College Life with Alaska Native Students Attending UAA	33
Summary of Literature Review, Research Rationale, and Significance of the Study ..	35
Chapter Three Methodology.....	38
Cultural Advisory Committee.....	38
Design Overview	38
Participant Recruitment	39
Participants.....	40
Measures	42
Demographic Questionnaire	42
Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)	42
Additional (Time 1) Questions	45
Additional (Time 2) Questions	45
Student Performance Survey	46

	Page
Procedures	46
All Participants	46
Talking Circle Condition	47
Mainstream Support Group Condition	49
Data and sample management	51
Quantitative Data Analysis	52
Qualitative Data Analysis	53
Specific Hypotheses for this Study	53
Chapter Four Results	55
Participation and Attrition Rates	55
Participant Demographics	56
Central Analyses	58
Effects on SACQ Academic Adjustment Scores	59
Effects on SACQ Social Adjustment Scores	60
Effects on SACQ Personal-Emotional Adjustment Scores	61
Effects on SACQ Attachment to the Situation Adjustment Scores	62
Effects on Commitment to Completing College	63
Effects on Other Time 2 Variables	64
Supplemental Qualitative Responses	65
Summary of Results	67
Chapter Five Discussion	68

	Page
Lack of Demonstrated Benefits of Both Conditions	69
Lack of Differences Between Conditions	71
A Glimmer of Potential	72
Implications for Alaska Native Services	75
Study Limitations	77
Conclusion	80
References	83
Appendices	93

List of Figures

Figure 1: Mean academic adjustment scores by time and group	60
Figure 2: Mean social adjustment scores by time and group	61
Figure 3: Mean personal-emotional adjustment scores by time and group	62
Figure 4: Mean attachment to the situation adjustment scores by time and group	63
Figure 5: Mean commitment to completing college scores by time and group	64

List of Tables

Table 1: Study Aims and Measures	8
Table 2: Talking Circles in Comparison to Mainstream Support Groups	29
Table 3: Mainstream Support Group; Supporting Students of Color on Campus (SSCC)	50-51
Table 4: Participants' Communities of Origin by the 24 Final Participants.....	57
Table 5: Comparison of Mean Ratings of Final 24 Participants on Pre-test Variables	58
Table 6: Additional Post-test (Time 2) Questions' Means between Groups	65

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Adjustment to College Life Participant Consent Form	93
Appendix B: Adjustment to College Life Research Debriefing Form	96
Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire	98
Appendix D: Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)	99
Appendix E: Pre-test Open-ended Questionnaire	100
Appendix F: Post-test Open-ended Questionnaire	101
Appendix G: Adjustment to College Life Study: Student Performance Survey	103
Appendix H: Responses to Open-Ended Questions	104
Appendix I: Pilot Study: The Talking Circle Interview Questions	108
Appendix J: Letter of Support- Jay Butler	109
Appendix K: Letter of Support- Jim La Belle	110
Appendix L: Letter of Support- Wilson Justin	111
Appendix M: Letter of Support- Rita Blumenstein	112

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my cultural mentors Dr. Rita Blumenstein, Yupik Tribal Doctor, Wilson Justin, Ahtna Athabascan leader and philosopher and Jim La Belle, Yupik leader and educator for their guidance and trust in me to document and transcribe their oral traditional knowledge about Talking Circles and history of our Peoples. I would like to acknowledge my mentor, Carolyn Crowder, Health Director, Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association for her faith in my capabilities and for observing the potential in me even when I was not capable of doing so myself. I would like to acknowledge several Alaska Native leaders whom I am thankful and humbled by their presence in my life during this academic journey including Alice Petrivelli, Nancy Furlow, Ph.D., George Charles, Ph.D., Larry Merculieff, Mary Reeves, Liz Sunnyboy, Yaari Kingeekuk, Julie Shane and Joe Garoutte for their knowledge and willingness to teach me about our Alaska Native Peoples including our history, traumas and beauty of the culture.

I would especially like to acknowledge my dissertation committee members including Dr. Claudia Lampman, Dr. Jim Allen and Dr. John Petraitis. From the bottom of my heart, I know that I could not have done this without each committee member's commitment and dedication to see me through this phase of my journey. I would like to above all thank my Chair—Dr. E.J.R. David for never giving up on me even when I struggled academically and emotionally throughout this entire process. You are truly the reason I am able to accomplish this academic journey without losing who I am. Qagaasakung (Thank You).

I would like to acknowledge all my brothers and sisters (Rena, Julie, Pachee, Becky, Angela, Nedesta, Sammy, Nicolai, Juan and Ben) because we only have each other. To my dearest friend Matt Sena for reminding me that there is a minor and major premise to everything we do. To my dearest girlfriend Renee Kochuten for loving me and being there from start to finish. To my new friendships and colleagues from the program that supported me by listening when I needed an ear, a shoulder to cry on, a cooked meal and someone to understand—Ruth, Cody, Jaedon, Tara, Jordan and Ruddy. To my friend Janice Hamrick, thank you for listening when I needed you. I would also like to thank the Alaska Native UAA students that made the commitment to participate in this study. The study would not be possible without them.

I would like to thank the following scholarships which contributed to funding this project including the American Psychological Association Minority Fellowship Program, Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association, The Aleut Foundation, Tanadgusix Corporation and the Alaska Native Community Advancement in Psychology (ANCAP) Program.

Finally I would like to thank the love of my life, Daniel Walter Woods, my husband and my best friend. I could not have possibly completed this effort without your love, patience, parenting to our children and endless understanding of my commitments with school. To my precious baby girl Jasmine for allowing mommy to do focus on school even when you desired my attention, I love you so much. To my little man Hunter for always reminding mommy daily how hard this was by asking—"you going to work mama."

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this Doctoral dissertation to my belated parents, Maria Shaishnikof and Juan Duenas Leon-Guerrero. I am blessed to have been born into two unique cultures (Unungan—Aleut and Chamorro) which emphasize the significance of honoring our Elders and giving thanks to the Creator. Mom and Dad, I know that you are spiritually present and extremely proud of this accomplishment and commitment to helping others.

Chapter One Introduction

Alaska Native Peoples have experienced an extensive history of colonization which has contributed to a loss of traditions, values, and native ways of being (Gone & Alcántara, 2007; Napoleon, 1996; Roderick, 2008; Sullivan & Brems, 1997). Before Western contact, Alaska Native traditions and values were kept alive through methods of oral tradition—story-telling (Labelle, Smith, Easley, & Charles 2005). All Alaska Native tribes used some type of story-telling system in order to maintain balance within their communities. These story-telling systems, often taking the form of songs, dance, and the circle, were typically facilitated by medicine men and women (or “Shamans,” the more common term introduced by Westerners) (Napoleon, 1996; Oleksa, 2005). These story-telling systems that were facilitated by tribal leaders insured that the indigenous Peoples of Alaska maintained healthy communities by passing on their traditions, cultural beliefs, and values (Oleksa, 2005).

With the introduction of Western influence, however, these medicinal and tribal leaders were forced to stop speaking their languages and practicing their traditions (Napoleon, 1996). This history of trauma has resulted in the oppression of cultural practices including story-telling (Napoleon, 1996). Given that story-telling is instrumental in maintaining indigenous ways of life, culture, and traditions, its stoppage due to colonialism contributed to significant cultural loss. In turn, such a cultural loss and the trauma associated with such experiences (i.e., historical trauma) has likely contributed to many consequences such as high rates of depression, alcoholism, and other

psychological issues within the Alaska Native community today (Duran, 2006; Duran & Duran, 1995; Gone & Alcántara, 2007; Napoleon, 1996; Sullivan & Brems, 1997).

A Focus on Alaska Native College Students

More contemporarily, cultural loss is further maintained when Alaska Native individuals leave their communities and become immersed in Western culture. This is perhaps most often the case among Alaska Native individuals who pursue college education, in that their connection to and engagement in their heritage culture is further weakened (or at least threatened) as they try to navigate successfully through the Western systems of colleges and universities. Thus, the cultural loss that Alaska Native college students typically experience may lead to psychological distress associated with various concerns such as depression, alcohol/substance use, and poor college performance.

College students in general have high rates of psychological problems including anxiety, depression, and substance abuse issues that may be partly attributed to the significant life changes and academic demands they are facing (Nolen-Hoeksema & Morrow, 1991; Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). For instance, in 2009, approximately 14% of United States college students reported that they used psychiatric medication subsequent to beginning college and 6% reported suicide ideation after beginning college (Center for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health, 2009). In addition, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse reported that nearly half of all full-time college students participate in binge drinking in addition to abusing other illegal or prescription drugs. Such reports suggest that approximately two million full-time students meet the criteria for substance dependence or abuse, which is 2.5 times more than in the general

population (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2007). More recently, findings from the National Survey of Counseling Center Directors suggest that these troubling statistics among American college students continue to rise across the nation (Gallagher, 2011).

In addition to the typical life adjustments, challenges, and stressors that come along with college life, Alaska Native college students also have to face conflicts between the ways of their heritage culture and the ways of Westernized systems of colleges and universities, placing them at higher risk for developing mental and behavioral health concerns. Among Alaska Native individuals between the ages of 18 and 34— a range that encompasses the typical age range of college students - the rate of binge drinking is significantly higher in comparison to other age groups (Hagan & Provost, 2009). Furthermore, according to the American Association of Suicidology (2010), over 90% of individuals who die by suicide are suffering from depression, anxiety, or other mental/behavioral health issues. Alaska holds the highest rate of suicide per capita in the country. Furthermore, Alaska Native males between the ages of 15 and 24 have the highest rate of suicide in comparison to any other group in the country with an average of 141 suicides per 100,000 people each year (Department of Health and Social Services, 2010). In 2007, Alaska's general population experienced a rate of 21.8 suicides per 100,000 people (78% are committed by men and 22% are committed by women); non-Native Alaskans had a rate of 13.1 per 100,000 people and Alaska Natives had a rate of 35.1 per 100,000 people (Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, 2010).

In addition to being at high risk for various mental and behavioral health concerns due to adjustment difficulties, Alaska Native college students also tend to struggle with academic performance. Difficulties related to adjusting to college life and academic success may lead to, or further exacerbate, other concerns such as substance use and depression. At the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), where Alaska Native students compose the largest non-White racial group on campus (Walters, 2009), statistics show that Alaska Native students are not graduating within the four year time span at a comparable rate to other students. Alaska Native students also have lower grade point averages than the general student population at UAA, and many Alaska Native students end up dropping out of college (Walters, 2009). The dropout rate for first-time, full-time Alaska Native undergraduate students is approximately 40% in comparison to 33% among the overall student population of first-time, full-time students (University of Alaska Anchorage, 2008). Despite the high likelihood that Alaska Native college students will experience academic and psychological difficulties, research suggests that American Indians and Alaska Native Peoples do not prefer services from providers who utilize Western models of mental health care (such as ones offered in university counseling services) due to their perceived lack of cultural sensitivity (Beals, et al., 2005; Novins, et al., 2004). Thus, many Native individuals – especially Native college students whose cultural connectedness may be in constant threat - may not be receiving the services that they may need (Beals, et al., 2005; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; Walls, Johnson, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2006).

The Potential of Talking Circles in Facilitating Adjustment to College Life

Although very scarce, there is some research suggesting that methods such as the talking circle are perceived as effective for dealing with historical loss, historical trauma, and associated consequences such as substance use, depression, and suicide among Native populations (Marbella, Harris, Diehr, Ignace, & Ignace, 1998; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006). As previously mentioned, the circle is one form in which indigenous Peoples share and impart their culture through story-telling, making circles highly consistent with indigenous ways and possibly contributing to its effectiveness. Through storytelling in circles, issues of historical trauma and other behavioral health issues are validated, and people are given the opportunity to process painful historical and contemporary experiences (Napoleon, 1996; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006). In colleges and universities, a typical mode of intervention offered to support students and facilitate their success that bears some resemblance to circles is support groups to aid in adjustment to college life. These groups may also allow students to process their difficulties and validate their experiences, as well as provide them with insight and strategies that may be useful in facilitating successful adjustment and performance.

However, typical college support groups may still be perceived by Alaska Native students as culturally-incongruent and inappropriate for their unique concerns and experiences. Unlike circles, typical college support groups tend to reflect Western cultural methods such as very structured agendas that demand attention to specific topics as they relate to college. College support groups are highly structured with curricula or manuals to abide by with specific goals and objectives. Furthermore, college support

groups promote autonomy, independence, identity, confidence, purpose, integrity, and the ability to manage one's emotions (Steen, Griffin, & Shi, 2011); such elements reflect individualistic characteristics that are more congruent with Western culture than Alaska Native collectivistic culture.

Circles, on the other hand, have been a concept known to Native Peoples well before the Western concept of "group counseling" or "support groups." Native Americans have been using groups such as circles for the maintenance of harmony and balance across all spectrums of life including personal, environmental, social, and spiritual (Garrett, Garrett, & Brotherton, 2001). Unlike the structured characteristic of college support groups, circles are very flexible and take on a life of their own, allowing participants to follow their hearts and spirits during the group process which allows seamless connections between the mind, body, and spirit. The circle emphasizes that participants try to understand themselves mentally, physically, spiritually, and spatially (Garrett et al., 2001). Circles represent unity and focus on the energy of working together and being one collectively, which is consistent with Alaska Native ways of being. Therefore, circles hold promise in terms of providing Alaska Native students a culturally-accepted forum in which to process, validate, and normalize their experiences, which may in turn help in facilitating their adjustment to college life and improving their academic performance. These potential benefits, however, have yet to be empirically explored, necessitating the importance of researching whether circles are at least as beneficial to Alaska Native students as mainstream support groups.

Study Aims and Significance

One of the current project's cultural advisors, Dr. Rita Blumenstein, prefers the term "talking circle" instead of other terms that are used to call the practice such as "circle" or "healing circle." Thus, for the remainder of the dissertation, the term "talking circle" (TC) will be used as I describe a study that attempts to understand better the process and benefits of TCs among Alaska Native college students. Specifically, the experimental study presented here examined the viability of a traditional method of healing – TCs – to help with adjustment to college life and academic success among Alaska Native students attending UAA; (study aims are summarized in Table 1). This study has the potential to provide a better understanding of the process of TCs and their effectiveness with Alaska Native Peoples. An empirically-based understanding of the TC may lead to more providers within the University system and in Alaska who may be interested in learning about and incorporating TCs into their work. The study could serve as an initial effort and step for further research and the development of programs focused on dealing with Alaska Native issues. More specifically, results of the proposed research may potentially lead to funding, planning, designing, and implementing more effective and culturally appropriate services and programs for Alaska Native students at UAA and Alaska Native individuals throughout Alaska, more generally. Furthermore, results of this study may contribute to the existing therapeutic approaches currently used with this population. Finally, it is hoped that this study will contribute to addressing a large knowledge gap in the general scholarship on the psychology of ethnic minorities by specifically investigating an understudied phenomenon (the TC process) and their

potential benefits among an understudied population (Alaska Native Peoples).

Table 1

Study Aims and Measures

Study Aims	Measures
Aim 1: To investigate the effectiveness of the TC in comparison to mainstream support groups in facilitating adjustment to college life among Alaska Native students attending UAA.	Adjustment to college life is based on four focused areas including: Academic Adjustment, Personal-Emotional Adjustment, Social Adjustment, and Attachment to the situation. This will be measured by the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ).
Aim 2: To investigate the effectiveness of the TC in comparison to mainstream support groups in facilitating academic performance among Alaska Native students attending UAA.	Academic performance will be measured by a Time 1 and Time 2 questionnaire of student performance and commitment to college.

Overview of Dissertation

The study that is presented here used an experimental design to compare the benefits of TCs relative to mainstream support groups for students in facilitating adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing college among Alaska Native students at UAA. Participants were randomly assigned to either a mainstream support group for adjustment to college or a TC support group. Participants completed measures of adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing their college education before and after the group sessions, with the main hypothesis being that, when compared to students who were assigned to a mainstream support group, those who were assigned to the TC group will have better adjustment to college life, school performance, and commitment to college. As

additional hypotheses, it was also predicted that participants in the TC sessions will report being heard better and more satisfied with their group than participants in the mainstream support group. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that TCs will be regarded as more culturally-sensitive and helpful than the mainstream support group.

Before delving further into the study details (discussed in Chapter Three), I will first provide a brief overview of the Alaska Native Peoples and the contemporary issues they are facing, issues that might be the consequences of historical trauma and subsequent cultural loss (Duran, 2006; Duran & Duran, 1995; Napoleon, 1996; Sullivan & Brems, 1997). This is followed by a discussion of qualitative data collected during a pilot study via key informant interviews with experts on the Alaska Native culture. Such data included a detailed discussion of the TC as a traditional healing pathway, perceived effectiveness of TCs as used among Alaska Native Peoples, and how the process holds promise in addressing various issues among these groups. This will be presented along with a review of how TCs are utilized in various contexts by indigenous groups while illustrating their effectiveness for several purposes. Next, a brief overview of mainstream support groups will be presented along with a comparison between TCs and mainstream support groups. Then, cultural considerations for student success and adjustment to college life among Alaska Native students will follow. Finally, beginning with Chapter Three, I will present a study that compared the effectiveness of TCs with a mainstream student support group in facilitating adjustment to college life, college success, and commitment to college among Alaska Native students.

Chapter Two Background and Significance

Overview of Alaska Native Culture and History

In both community and scholarly discourses, Alaska Native Peoples are habitually and simplistically referenced as “Alaska Natives.” However, this extraordinarily diverse group of Peoples include seven main cultural groups—Aleut (Unungan), Athabascan, Eyak, Eskimo (Yup’ik, Cup’ik, Siberian Yupik, Sugpiaq/Alutiiq, Inupiaq), Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian (Roderick, 2008) – who embrace and practice distinct traditions, beliefs, languages, and values. Despite the cultural differences, however, one important trait that is similar among all Alaska Native tribes is their relationship with the land, water, and animals which have provided them with “life” over the past 10,000 years (Roderick, 2008). This special and respectful relationship and connection with nature drives many aspects of Alaska Native indigenous ways of life and worldviews that are often reflected in various activities such as hunting, fishing, berry picking, and gathering herbs and other medicinal plants. Today, many Alaska Native tribes continue to rely on these natural resources for their diet, clothing, entertainment, and other essentials while living in rural Alaska (Napoleon, 1996; Roderick, 2008).

However, the decades of colonialism and oppression experienced by the Alaska Native Peoples has been devastating and its impact has adversely affected the Peoples in every capacity of mind, body, and spirit (Napoleon, 1996). The forced acceptance and practice of Christianity required Alaska’s indigenous peoples to abandon their cultural beliefs and the practices of medicine men and women (Napoleon, 1996; Roderick, 2008). The trauma experienced by Alaska Native Peoples due to the oppression of their cultural

traditions and values have displaced multiple generations from the culture (Roderick, 2008). The loss of culture is also related to mass numbers of lives lost during the 1900 influenza epidemic, also known as the “Great Death,” during which approximately 74,000 Alaska Native Peoples died (Boraas, 1991). Such an epidemic killed valued individuals including elders and traditional healers, and left unimaginable numbers of children orphaned (Napoleon, 1996), which significantly disrupted the process of passing on cultural values, beliefs, and traditions inter-generationally. Additionally, as a result of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), Alaska’s indigenous Peoples lost millions of acres of land which ultimately resulted in a loss of culture – culture that was driven by the Peoples’ intimate connection to the land and its resources as discussed above. Such experiences of colonialism and oppression, along with immense cultural loss that many often refer to as “historical trauma,” has been argued to be the root of many psychological and behavioral health concerns among Alaska Native Peoples today (Napoleon, 1996; Roderick, 2008). Indeed, Alaska Natives have some of the most disproportionately high rates of psychological and behavioral health problems in comparison to all other ethnic groups (Napoleon, 1996; Roderick, 2008; Walls et al., 2006).

Contemporary Experiences of Psychological Distress and Historical Trauma

Alaska’s indigenous Peoples are currently experiencing startling rates of psychological distress including alcoholism, depression, and suicide (Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, 2007; Morgan & Freeman, 2009; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2012). Suicide has plagued Alaska’s indigenous

Peoples for decades and continues to anguish tribes across the state. Indeed, the suicide rate among Alaska Natives is twice the national average (Spengler, 2010) and 117% higher than among any other indigenous American group (Morgan & Freeman, 2009). Relatedly, Alaska Natives also have high rates of depression and psychological distress (Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, 2007). Furthermore, the percentage of Alaska Native or American Indian Peoples that require treatment for alcoholism or other drug use problems was nearly double the national average (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2012). Historical trauma is probably one of the main risk factors contributing to such psychological and behavioral health concerns. Perhaps one of the best examples of painful historical experiences that led to immense cultural loss among Alaska Native Peoples is the boarding school era (i.e., the history of prohibition from cultural ways of knowing in the school system such as teachers punishing students for use of native language and traditions, prohibiting a traditional foods diet, endorsing brutal corporal punishment, and Christian indoctrination), which has been argued by various scholars and community leaders to be still impacting this population today through intergenerational trauma (Adams, 1995; J. La Belle, personal communication, October 16, 2009; Miller, 1996; Napoleon, 1996; Spengler, 2010).

Indeed, Alaska Native Peoples have an extensive history of colonialism between 1741 and the 1800s and onward (Roderick, 2008). In addition to the boarding school era, other examples of group – or large scale (collective) – traumas include the Aleut internment during World War II (L. Mercurieff, personal communication, September 25, 2009) and the traumatic impact of epidemics such as tuberculosis, smallpox, and

influenza on Alaska Native Peoples introduced by outsiders entering their villages (Napoleon, 1996), all of which have contributed to a loss of culture. Indeed, as a result of colonialism by European immigrants, Alaska Native Peoples were exposed to diseases from which they were not yet immune and this led to large numbers of deaths in the communities including Alaska Native medicine people and culture-bearers (Morgan & Freeman, 2009). Thus, the diseases brought on by colonialism contributed to the decline and eventual stoppage of the practices of Alaska Native medicine people and culture-bearers (Roderick, 2008). For example, Napoleon describes how tuberculosis, smallpox, and influenza wiped out a significant number of Alaska Native Peoples – including elders and culture bearers – causing the loss of transfer of traditional knowledge and values from one generation to the next. Additionally, the influence of Christian missionaries and the boarding school era have unfortunately deprived Alaska Native Peoples from embracing their language, traditions, and values (La Belle et al., 2005). Some describe this part of history as a sudden hold on Alaska Native cultures and a temporary ignoring of their formerly thriving cultures (Napoleon, 1996).

The unresolved grief associated with such traumatic and oppressive experiences has been argued to be contributing to issues of suicide and alcoholism among Alaska Native Peoples (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Napoleon, 1996). Such historical soul wounds (Duran, 2006) have been described as the primary reason why it is difficult to progress and develop Native American communities socially, politically, and economically (Lambert, 2008). Until these soul wounds are dealt with, their mental health manifestations such as depression, alcohol abuse, addictive behaviors, and suicides

may unfortunately continue (Duran, 2006). However, it is extremely difficult to address soul wounds and past traumas given that such history is generally not spoken about -- especially among survivors. For example, it is uncommon to hear elders of the Pribilof Islands converse about the history of the Aleut internment and oppression by the U.S. Federal Government during World War II (Torrey, 1980). According to Napoleon, remaining silent about their experiences may be the only way Alaska Native Peoples knew how to deal with such trauma.

Despite the high rates of distress experienced by Alaska Native Peoples and the salience of historical trauma or soul wounds (Duran, 2006; Duran & Duran, 1995; Napoleon, 1996) among this group, research has found that Alaska Native and other Native American Peoples seek and utilize mental health services at very low rates (Beals et al., 2005; Novins et al., 2004). This large disparity between high rates of psychological distress and low rates of service utilization suggests that many Alaska Natives and Native Americans may not be receiving appropriate services for their distress. This disparity is possibly a reflection of lack of accessible, welcoming, culturally responsive, non-threatening, and effective treatment methods for these communities. Thus, it is possible that the historical traumas that may be partly driving the high rates of psychological distress among Alaska Native Peoples today have not been successfully dealt with through conventional services (e.g., individual counseling or group therapy) because such Western models of mental health care do not incorporate traditional cultural beliefs and practices (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000). For example, one study that included participants who represented 30 Native tribes found that Native

patients rated their traditional healer's advice as more important than their physician's advice 61.4% of the time (Marbella et al., 1998). Marbella et al. (1998) also found that 38% of the Native sample received care from a traditional healer and 86% would consider seeing a traditional healer in the future. These findings suggest that many Native individuals may prefer services that are more consistent with their traditional cultural beliefs.

Traditional healing methods that are commonly utilized by Native Americans and Alaska Natives include culturally congruent practices such as sweat lodges, sacred dances, songs, and TCs. In a landmark study by Walls and colleagues (2006), Native participants strongly preferred traditional methods of treatment to Western medical services. The researchers found that 71% of participants felt that talking to a family member would be most effective and that 60% felt that talking to a tribal elder would be very effective in dealing with mental health or substance abuse issues. Furthermore, 30-50% of study participants rated traditional ceremonies including the pipe ceremony, sweat lodge, and TCs as effective for dealing with mental health or substance abuse issues, whereas only 18.6-29.9% of the participants rated Western treatment options as effective. Thus, the limited existing literature suggests that Native Peoples prefer and believe in the effectiveness of traditional healing practices such as the TC to facilitate healing from historical trauma, alcohol abuse, and other issues they may be experiencing (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; La Belle et al., 2005; LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990; Napoleon, 1996).

In the next section, I provide qualitative data regarding the process, practice, and history of the use of the TC among Alaska Native Peoples. Although there is some published literature about the TC as practiced by other groups, the availability of literature and resources regarding the utilization of the TC for healing specifically with Alaska Native Peoples is very scarce. Thus, a pilot study for this dissertation research using key informant interviews with Alaska Native elders and leaders was conducted to gather more information about TC among Alaska Native Peoples (Woods, 2010).

Participants in the pilot study included: (1) Yupik Tribal Doctor Rita Blumenstein - a well-known traditional healer and member of the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers working together to heal the world, and who has facilitated and taught TC throughout the state of Alaska since she was an adolescent; (2) Ahtna Athabascan leader and philosopher Wilson Justin - a well-known former leader within the Alaska Tribal Health System and someone who possesses a wealth of knowledge regarding the histories of many elements of Alaska Native culture including the TC; and (3) Jim La Belle – an Inupiaq leader, and well-respected former instructor in the Alaska Native Studies program at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). Key informant interviews with each Alaska Native elder, leader, and culture bearer were completed in person with open-ended questions (see Appendix I) inquiring about the process, history, and utilization of TCs among Alaska Native Peoples.

Pilot Study: The Talking Circle

The Talking Circle Process. According to Dr. Blumenstein, the TC is led by a facilitator who typically begins the process by saying a prayer or by burning sage to

cleanse the space. It should be noted, however, that whether or not a TC is opened with a prayer and/or by burning sage is determined by the facilitator as he/she deems appropriate based on the TC participants, the circle topic/purpose, and the setting. Occasionally, TCs may be opened with a story, drum, or song, giving thanks to ancestors in place of a traditional prayer. In preparation to starting a TC, ground rules are enforced and the statement “what’s said here stays here” is honored and practiced. The TC facilitator begins the process by demonstration, sharing his or her past and present identity. In order to fully engage participants in the TC, the circle facilitator shares as much personal information as the other participants. Although the TC process raises many typical clinical psychology ethical dilemmas such as confidentiality and self-disclosure by the TC facilitator and participants, Dr. Blumenstein and Mr. LaBelle reported that this method produces effective results in working with indigenous populations, including those living in sparsely populated Alaska Native rural communities. A talking piece such as a rock, bone, feather, stick, or soap stone carving has great significance in the TC process. Dr. Blumenstein suggested that for the individuals participating, the talking piece represents control of the floor to speak and be heard without interruption. Once someone is finished talking, the piece is handed to the next person in a clockwise manner, which is in alignment with the four directions following the movement of the sun (North, South, East, and West). In most Native American cultures, the TC process would start at the East, then move to the South, followed by the West, and end in the North (Clarkson, Morrisette & Régallet, 1992). The TC process is meant to create a safe environment for individuals to share significant

life stories and life struggles that continue to affect them and their communities (Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006). TCs can be used to help participants cope with and heal from a wide range of issues such as community struggles (including death or natural disasters), critical incidents like suicide, and other difficult life experiences (e.g., alcohol abuse, domestic violence, or dealing with certain health issues; Hodge, Fredericks, & Rodriguez, 1996; Napoleon, 1996).

Mr. La Belle recommended several factors to consider when facilitating TCs, especially as they pertain to participants' comfort levels. First, it is beneficial to maintain awareness regarding the focus of a TC and to be mindful of inviting mixed genders to participate. To further explain, he suggested that it is best not to include both males and females in a TC if the topic is focusing on domestic violence or sexual abuse in a relationship. Secondly, Mr. La Belle stated that TC participants should always be reminded about the state and federal laws that mandate reporting of "confessed crimes" and the duty of the facilitator to report any abuse to children and the elderly (American Psychological Association, 2011). Third, Dr. Blumenstein and Mr. La Belle both emphasized that structuring the size of a TC will impact the amount of time a TC will take to complete. A group larger than 12 individuals may take a minimum of two hours to complete the first round of introductions alone. It is imperative that all individuals are given the same privileges of time and respect to share their stories. Finally, Mr. La Belle highlighted that the space used to facilitate a TC should be carefully considered. For instance, special attention to the amount of stimulation within the room, and its comfort and size are important elements to consider. Both Mr. La Belle and Mr. Justin

emphasized that the space should reflect a safe place where individuals can “open their hearts and speak from their souls.”

Talking Circle Practice and History in Alaska. Dr. Blumenstein referenced the TC as a healing modality utilized among indigenous populations to focus on the mind, body, and spirit in efforts to become whole. Currently, TCs are one source of culturally responsive therapeutic treatments utilized among some Alaska Native tribes. Dr. Blumenstein suggested that using the TC as a method for addressing the high rates of behavioral health issues among Alaska Native groups is essential to begin the healing process. Dr. Blumenstein perceives the TC as a tool which is utilized to “learn about oneself” and to learn from other participants in the TC. Dr. Blumenstein reported that it was essential for Alaska Native ancestors to rely on the TC as a means for teaching, to help people grow, and to be open to all relatives here on earth. Every participant who sits in the TC has something to offer which will enrich all participants’ lives.

Mr. Justin shared his knowledge regarding the history of the TC in Alaska. He stated: “The circle is not necessarily a ‘healing circle,’ but rather it’s the start and possibly the end to one’s healing journey.” He also stated that, “The original circle was nothing about trauma, but the new circle is all about trauma.” According to Mr. Justin, the original TC was the way for the medicine man or Shaman to conduct various “businesses” or accomplish multiple purposes. The original value of the TC was to generate honesty and reinforce the sacred higher power of the people. In its history, the TC was used as a teaching tool to inform tribal members about how to behave and appreciate the sacred gift of the indigenous language. Mr. Justin reported, “Our language

is a healing language, the way we use our language in the circle is sacred. Our languages are gender neutral.” Mr. Justin reported that when using the Native language during a TC, tribes do not permit derogatory terminology. Furthermore, he stated that while engaging in the TC process that only truthfulness, faithfulness, and good character were promoted, and that the history of using the TC among Alaska Native Peoples was literally a moment to “speak from the heart” and heal.

Mr. Justin shared that the history of the TC among Alaska Native Peoples was multi-dimensional (for different purposes) and it was used as a way to prevent violating tribal laws and issues. TCs were used to discuss various topics such as broken promises, bad marriages, and civil situations. These issues were discussed and resolved within the TC process. From the beginning of childhood, the indigenous Peoples of Alaska were taught that the tribe was first, family was second, and finally “self” was last. Further, Mr. Justin shared that the TC was used as tool to allow people to be individuals for a short while and separate from the tribe to see themselves as “self.”

In summary, the results of the pilot study suggested that there are many factors to consider in order to practice TCs successfully, effectively, and respectfully. Records of the TC’s history within the Alaska Native context have not been as well-documented as with other very similar populations such as the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada and other Native American tribes (Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006). Furthermore, it is clear from the pilot study described above that although there are variations between tribes, many Alaska Natives also regard the TC as a tool for individuals to begin their healing journey, to have freedom of expression in a safe setting, and to evaluate their own personal lives.

In the next section, I provide a brief discussion of the TC as practiced by some Alaska Native communities, as well as other culturally - and geographically-similar groups for addressing different purposes or issues.

The Talking Circle as Practiced by Various Groups in Various Contexts

Talking/Healing Circles with Other Indigenous Groups of the North. Prior to European contact, the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada embraced a spectrum of traditional healing practices that are still in use today including the TC, which they refer to as the Healing Circle (Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990; McCormick, Neumann, Amundson & McLean, 1999). Thus, for this section only, the term Healing Circle will be used. The Healing Circle is often utilized to facilitate healing experiences among groups sharing journeys (Department of Justice Canada, 2004; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000), such as healing from historical trauma (Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006). Similar to Alaska Native and American Indian groups, research has shown that Canadian Aboriginals avoid utilization of Western mental health services (McCormick, 1997; Trimble & Fleming, 1989) and prefer Healing Circles over any other conventional medical or health services (Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006).

According to Canadian Aboriginal worldviews, the Healing Circle is a reflection of the sacredness and interrelatedness of all living things (Hart, 1997; Nabigon, Hagey, Webster, & MacKay, 1998), a worldview which is consistent with those of Alaska Natives. Additionally, the Healing Circle is perceived within the Canadian Aboriginal society as a non-hierarchical and inclusive process that represents elements of respect for equality (Hart, 1997). Elders play a significant role in the Healing Circle and, according

to their society, the Healing Circle begins in the East which represents the beginning or a child, it then moves to the South which represents youth, on to the West representing adulthood, and finally moves to the North which represents elders (Clarkson et al., 1992). Aboriginal Canadian communities have utilized the Healing Circle as a process to teach about the effects of colonization on their people and it has been a successful tool in facilitating the process of cultural revival (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996; Hart, 1997).

The utilization of the Healing Circle among Canadian Aboriginal populations, a group that is very similar to Alaska Natives, suggests that it can be successful for dealing with past issues of colonization, mental health issues, and cultural revitalization. Given that alcoholism rates among Alaska Native Peoples are double the national average (Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration, 2012), which likely contributes to the high rates of Alaska Native adults and juveniles in correctional systems (Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, 2007), it seems important to discuss the current use of the TC in correctional settings. The following section describes alternative ways to deal with victims and offenders within the justice system through the TC process.

Circles for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking. Restorative justice is a fairly new phenomenon within the past decade and it has claimed to offer alternatives to the conventional justice systems which emphasize punishment. It focuses on repairing harm caused by criminal behavior and promotes that all stakeholders involved (including the victims and offenders) should cooperate with the processes (Roberts & Stalans, 2004).

Similar to restorative justice, however, Indigenous Justice Systems (IJS) have been known to be in existence prior to Western influence (Coates, Umbreit, & Vos, 2000; Eller, 2005). In a key informant interview for Woods (2010), Mr. Justin suggested that the TC process was utilized by some Alaska Native tribes to prevent violating tribal law. According to Eller (2005), the six principles of IJS heavily align with elements of the TC process. First, IJS are referred to as *holistic systems* because they emphasize the importance of the “whole society” and the maintenance of balance, peace, and harmony of the community. Second, they are also known to acknowledge that *communication is fluid* and that language has been identified as a necessity to form trusting relationships which can promote healing to victims, offenders, and all community members. Third, the *process is based on distributive justice* in IJS, meaning that the involvement of every community member is essential to help the victim and offenders heal. This involves a level of spirituality through being open minded and through ceremony. Fourth, *reparative principles are used* within IJS which involves accountability on the offender’s part to make amends. Lastly, *restorative principles are used and the process is not limited by time*. These involve seeking forgiveness and appreciation for silence, patience, and the task of listening in order to heal properly (Eller, 2005).

In Alaska, Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) is an example of a tribal council that has established youth courts utilizing the TC process based on these IJS principles. It is a process involving the victims, offenders, and community members to discuss the problem identified. It allows participants to have discussions together, in a safe setting that promote finding solutions as a community (Eller, 2005), which is a type of circle

sentencing. Circle sentencing is a significant part of restorative justice processes within the justice systems that use restorative practices and are very similar to Healing Circles (Eller, 2005). Circle sentencing can take various forms and is used in different ways including peacemaking or restorative justice circles, circles of understanding, Healing Circles (generally for a combination of the offender-family, victim-family, or offender, victim, and community), or family case conferencing circles. Circle sentencing offers an equitable environment where both the victim and offender have an equal opportunity to be heard (Coates et al., 2000; Grohs, 1998; Rieger, 2001). The theory of this process is based upon a joint effort of the entire community deciding the overall wellness of everyone. Rather than sentencing an individual in a typical courtroom, the individual is sentenced within their own community by the community through a TC process (Grohs, 1998). Similar to the Healing Circle process in general, there is a lack of descriptive material documenting how TCs function to meet the purposes of restorative justice (Coates et al., 2000).

There are several ground rules which govern the sentencing circle in restorative justice processes (Grohs, 1998). According to Grohs, the sentencing circle contains balance and no individual in the sentencing circle holds more power than the next. There are no interruptions during the sentencing circle process, only one person speaks at a time, and laws of the Creator (higher power) govern the individual who is speaking. These laws include being honest, sharing, being kind, and respectful. Finally, decisions made in the sentencing circle are solely based on consensus of its participants and the circle facilitator or chairperson is responsible for maintenance of order and the overall

process. These ground rules are very similar to the ones observed in TCs as previously described.

The community of Kake, Alaska has implemented what they refer to as the “circle peacemaking process.” Kake’s tribal leadership highlights the importance of incorporating Tlingit values in the circle process. Some believe that peacemaking circles were a revival of something that already existed and was utilized by their people in the past but had remained inactive since Western influence came to Alaska (Rieger, 2001). This is similar to Mr. Justin’s comment on Western influence interrupting TC used for community wellness. According to Rieger, Kake adopted this process from Carcross, Yukon Territory and their restorative justice system. This particular model requires that an elder sponsor the offender and this is initiated by the offender offering some sort of traditional activity. In return, the elder supports the offender in the TC process. Ground rules of such processes include a) what goes on in the peacemaking circle remains in the circle, b) each person has an opportunity to speak when they have the talking piece, and c) discussion continues around the peacemaking circle only until a consensus has been reached by all participants and a plan is in place (Rieger, 2001).

In summary, many indigenous groups – including some Alaska Native communities – have begun to use the TC in addressing various issues such as depression, substance use, and even crime and delinquency. These are issues that are often faced by various indigenous populations. Despite the use of TCs in various settings by various groups for various purposes, however, the effectiveness of TC as used among Alaska Native Peoples remains unexplored. Thus, an empirical investigation of the potential

benefits of the TC among Alaska Native Peoples is sorely needed. In efforts to condense such a substantial investigation and to create a foundation for future research on the effectiveness of TC as a whole, this study focused specifically on the TCs potential to influence adjustment to college life and academic performance among Alaska Native students.

Talking Circles and Mainstream Support Groups

Similar to TC, mainstream support groups (MSG) (including group therapy and group counseling) are services that are commonly offered and used in colleges and universities throughout the United States to help students in their adjustment to college life including to deal with symptoms that may be impacting their academic performance such as depression or alcoholism. Indeed, this typical mode of intervention to support students and facilitate their success bears some resemblance to TC. Similar to TCs, MSGs also allow students to process their difficulties and validate their experiences, as well as provide them with insight and strategies that may be useful in facilitating successful adjustment and performance (Yalom, 2005). Unlike TC, however, MSGs are relatively well-studied and their effectiveness has been well-documented. For instance, according to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) developmental model, there are seven common stressors faced by college students: 1) developing confidence, 2) managing emotions, 3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, 4) developing mature interpersonal relationships, 5) establishing identity, 6) developing purpose, and 7) developing integrity. The American Counseling Association suggests that mainstream support groups such as the one which will be facilitated for the current study (i.e., the

Supporting Students of Color on Campus Program, which is discussed in more later in Chapter Three) have some empirical support for addressing these seven common stressors (Fitch & Marshall, 2011). In the next section, I continue to delineate the similarities and differences between TCs and MSGs.

A Comparison between Talking Circles and Mainstream Support Groups

There are significant differences between TCs and MSGs (i.e., group therapy, support groups) regarding their essential elements. For instance, one major difference between them involves self-disclosure by the group facilitator (also known as therapists, clinicians or counselors). Although MSGs allow some self-disclosure, such disclosure is often carefully filtered and given careful consideration about its therapeutic value to the group rather than for self-gain (Yalom, 2005). Alternatively, immediate self-disclosure without filtering is a necessary part of the process for what makes the TC work effectively. In other words, TCs promotes openly and honestly sharing oneself without filtering the information for the sake of the group participants. In comparison, self-disclosures by the facilitator in MSGs are first and foremost based on the well-being of the clients/group participants and all self-disclosure is given careful consideration prior to sharing (Yalom, 2005). Furthermore, MSG facilitators are not regulated nor taught in training to self-disclose immediately at the same level as the TC facilitators at the start of the group process. Moreover, facilitators of TCs fully engage in the TC process all throughout; whereas, facilitators of MSGs act more as observers rather than a part of the process (Yalom, 2005). Another element of the TC that is significantly different from MSGs is the time it takes for the process. Time is unlimited and generally determined by

the flow of the process during TCs, but time is typically regulated and strictly followed within MSGs (Yalom, 2005). Finally, transference (a process in which a person unconsciously redirects their feelings about something onto someone else) is welcomed during TCs and it is not subjected to further analyses nor is it addressed by other group members. In comparison, during MSG sessions, transference is often analyzed by group members and the facilitator in a direct manner (Yalom, 2005). The differences between the two types of group activities suggest that TCs promote focusing on one's self only, rather than taking interest in how to analyze or give advice to others in the group.

MSGs are often conducted in a setting similar to the indigenous TCs, as described earlier. MSGs, however, are mostly grounded in a Eurocentric perspective (Eason, 2009) in that MSGs require the facilitator to create and maintain the group, build a group culture, and activate the here-and-now (Yalom, 2005). Furthermore, it is the role of the facilitator to structure the setting (Yalom, 2005) and he/she is trained to consider the structure and power dynamics between participants while developing the group (Eason, 2009). According to some scholars (Billow, 2005), such a strong adherence to structure in MSGs may contribute to feelings of oppression among some participants.

TCs, on the other hand, are different from MSGs in terms of adherence to structure, process, and integration of elements that are considered culturally appropriate to Alaska Native groups. For instance, the only significance of power held in a TC is the "talking piece." In other words, rather than the group facilitator holding power, the individual who has the talking piece has the power and demands the attention of all other participants. In Native American history, the TC upholds an energy that is a respectful

and safe setting to speak from the heart (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006). It offers a level of immediate interconnectedness that is not typical in MSGs (Garrett et al., 2001; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006). Traditional opening of a TC typically involves a prayer or smudging for the purpose of purifying the space (Garrett et al., 2001). The TC promotes unity through focusing on oneself while allowing others to identify how they may connect with the person speaking (Garrett et al., 2001; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006). Finally, it is not uncommon to begin each round of a TC with the oral tradition of story-telling and referencing cultural myths as a spiritual guide to formulate the topic of discussion (Hodge et al., 1996). Table 2 illustrates a summary of the differences among TCs and MSGs.

Table 2

Talking Circles in Comparison to Mainstream Support Groups

Talking Circles	Mainstream Support Groups
Opens with spirituality (i.e., prayer or smudging)	Typically opens with first names only
Self-disclosure is recommended of the facilitator	Self-disclosure is limited by the facilitator
Time is unlimited	Time is limited
Facilitators engage all throughout	Facilitators maintain clear boundaries
Transference is not analyzed by other group members or the facilitator	Transference is analyzed by other group members or facilitator
Person with the talking piece has the power	Facilitator has the power
Individuals reflect solely on themselves rather than worrying about others in the group	Individuals are encouraged to provide insight about others in the group rather than focusing solely on self
Promotes harmony and balance	Promotes individual purpose, integrity, and autonomy

Small Steps: A Focus on Alaska Native College Students

Alaska Native college students have to navigate through the Westernized systems and standards of colleges and universities in addition to the typical stressors college students face in general. Furthermore, historical trauma and cultural loss may be especially salient for this population and is a factor that may be contributing to difficulties in adjusting to college life and academic performance. Therefore, a focus on evaluating the effectiveness of TCs in facilitating adjustment to college life and academic performance among Alaska Native college students is a logical and feasible first step in establishing a body of empirically-based literature on the effectiveness of TCs in general.

Alaska Native students are the second largest racial group at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA; Walters, 2009). However, despite the high percentage of attendees, Alaska Native students are less likely to graduate within a four year time span at a rate comparable to other groups; and many Alaska Native students drop out (Walters, 2009). In a University of Alaska Anchorage, 2012 performance report, it was revealed that the attrition rate of first-time, full-time Alaska Native students decreased by 3% (from 12% in Fall of 2009 to 9% in Fall 2010). Furthermore, the recorded retention rate for 2012 was 49%, the first time it has dropped below 50% since 2006. In addition, Alaska Native/American Indian (AN/AI) college students' grade point averages (2.40-2.53) are consistently lower than the grades of the overall undergraduate student population (2.92; Moore, 2003). A University of Alaska Anchorage, 2009 performance report showed that although the retention rates (defined as the number of students who remain in college) of Alaska Native (55%) and American Indian students (41%) have

been increasing, their retention rate continued to be lower in comparison to the other students: African American = 70%; Asian/Pacific Islander = 77 %; Hispanic = 71%; White = 72%; and Multi/Other = 70%.

During 2005-2007, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that approximately 28% of Alaska Native adults have some college credits compared to 6% in 1970. Additionally, approximately 8% of Alaska Native adults attending college in 2005-07 earned a four-year degree compared to 1% in 1970. However, the percentage of Alaska Native college graduates (8%) is still less than the U.S. average (27%; Martin & Hill, 2009). AN/AI undergraduate students average a half letter grade behind the rest of the student population (Moore, 2003).

There are many factors that could potentially be contributing to these statistics for Alaska Native students, including lack of preparation and strong academic skills, financing for college, and significant psychological issues impacting them and their communities such as suicide (University of Alaska Anchorage, 2009). In addition to these potential contributing factors, Alaska Native college students may also be experiencing other factors that negatively influence their college life and academic performance such as the challenge of moving from rural to urban settings, cultural clashes, differences in communication styles, and differences in traditions and values. One example quote reported by a staff member from UAA's Native Student Services was, "Students may feel funny or ashamed for coming to UAA. They are not following their cultural traditions. It can be weird for elders too, they would like to keep traditions

alive, yet they would also like the younger generations to go to college even though they miss out on cultural education” (as quoted by Walters, 2009, p. 10).

Willy Templeton, the Director of Native Student Services at UAA stated that “Native Students enroll because they are being encouraged by people from the village. Unfortunately, many of these students usually go home. What we are seeing are students returning after a few years on their own terms” (as quoted in Walters, 2009, p.11). In addition, it is possible that students dropout or develop academic problems because they become involved with drugs and/or alcohol as a result of conflicts with forced adaptation to the culture (Reyhner, 1992). The National Study of Indian Education during the 1960s highlighted the obvious cultural discontinuity between Native culture and school culture for secondary education (Fuchs & Havighurst, 1972). Furthermore, such cultural discontinuity in secondary education perhaps further contributes to Alaska Native students struggling in the higher education college system. Gilliland (1986) suggested seven factors which may be responsible for the poor academic performance of American Indian students in secondary education settings including: 1) differences between Native and school culture, 2) ignorance of Native culture by school staff, 3) differences between students’ and faculty values, 4) poor motivation of Native students, 5) language barriers between students and faculty, 6) students’ home and community problems, and 7) inappropriate use of culturally-biased tests (e.g., tests that are standardized with non-Native samples or written only in the English language) with Native students. As can be seen, all of the factors above speak to a conflict between Native culture and the Western systems that largely define the culture and shape the expectations of college institutions.

As a result, students are left to choose between education and culture. When education is chosen, there is often a spiral effect, leading to psychological problems (Reyhner, 1992). For instance, if students choose education over culture, they may feel rejection by their families and communities and consequently cope with these differences through alcohol and other drug abuse (Reyhner, 1992).

It is important to note that there are several existing programs and services implemented at UAA to support Alaska Native students across various disciplines, including Native Student Services (NSS), Alaska Native Community Advancement in Psychology (ANCAP), Recruiting and Retention of Alaska Natives in Nursing (RRANN), Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP), Alaska Native Oratory Society (AKNOS), Alaska Native Rural Outreach Program (ANROP), Pre-College Academic Enrichment in Rural Alaska, and the Native Early Transitions and Off-Campus Orientation Outreach (Triple O). All of these existing programs provide various forms of student supports (University of Alaska Anchorage, 2008). Not one of these student support programs, however, offers the TC as an alternative mode of supporting students and facilitating their adjustments to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing their college education. Thus, the proposed study has the potential to demonstrate empirically the benefits and effectiveness of the TC in facilitating adjustment to college life, academic success, and commitment to college among Alaska Native students. In the following section, I will briefly describe a recent study conducted about adjustment to college life among UAA students.

Adjustment to College Life with Alaska Native Students Attending UAA

Adjustment to college life encompasses four primary areas: (1) academic, (2) social, (3) personal-emotional, and (4) attachment to the educational institutional goals (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Literature suggests that certain populations of college students, including first generation college students, those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and students of color are not typically as successful during their first year of college compared to those who are not first generation college students, who are from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and who are not members of racial/ethnic minority groups (Cole, 2009). Regardless of such factors that may put certain students at higher risk to have poor adjustment to college, studies show that most students are rarely prepared for college at all (Hicks & Heastie, 2008).

Dr. Bruce Schultz (2008), UAA Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, conducted a descriptive study of freshman adjustment to college at the University of Alaska. The study's sample included 13.9% Alaska Native/Native American, 10.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.5% Black, 3.7% Hispanic or Latino, 65.6% White and 4.3% self-identified as other/unknown. A total of 27% of the participants were from rural areas (and mostly Alaska Natives) and 73% were from urban areas of origin. In addition, 35.4% of the sample lived on campus and 64.6% lived off campus. Using the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1999), Schultz found that students who adjust better to college within their first year tend to thrive academically, which increases the likelihood of graduation (Schultz, 2008; Steen et al., 2011). However, rural students appeared to experience more difficulty with adjusting to college than students from urban

communities. Rural students also had lower motivation to attend college, were less likely to complete their academic responsibilities, and had lower educational determination (Schultz, 2008). Moreover, rural students struggled with being away from their communities, families and friends and tended to feel disengaged and disempowered (Schultz, 2008). Finally, the study identified rural students living off campus as being at greatest risk for dropping out of college due to an increased sense of homesickness, social isolation, and lack of attachment to the educational institution (Schultz, 2008).

Summary of Literature Review, Research Rationale, and Significance of the Study

Based on the few published studies and the pilot data collected via key informant interviews with Alaska Native elders and leaders, 10 conclusions may be drawn concerning the experiences of Alaska Native Peoples.

1. Alaska Native Peoples have a special and respectful relationship with their natural environment, which drives their indigenous cultural beliefs, practices, and values.
2. Indigenous cultural beliefs, practices, and values were traditionally passed on inter-generationally through various forms of oral communication, one of which is story-telling in the form of a TC.
3. Indigenous cultural beliefs, practices, and values – along with the modes of maintaining them (e.g., story-telling) – were disrupted by colonialism and oppression.

4. Colonialism and oppression as experienced by Alaska Native Peoples led to the loss of land and lives, which contributed to significant levels of cultural loss.
5. Cultural loss and historical trauma have been regarded by various scholars and community leaders as the root causes of the many troubling psychological concerns faced by Alaska Native Peoples today.
6. Existing services for such psychological concerns are based on Western theories and models that some in the Alaska Native community perceive as inconsistent with their cultural ways, leading many Alaska Native individuals not to seek or benefit from such forms of service.
7. Traditional forms of healing such as Healing Circles have been documented to be better-received and beneficial among Canadian Aboriginals and American Indians, groups with similar cultural beliefs and historical experiences as Alaska Native Peoples.
8. Among Alaska Native Peoples, there is very little published empirical literature regarding the benefits of the TC to address issues such as substance use, psychological distress, and depression, issues that may be especially salient among Alaska Native college students because of the stressors (e.g., adjusting to college life, college academic standards, pressures to adhere to Western systems and values) they face on daily basis.
9. Alarming statistics regarding Alaska Native student retention rates, academic performance, and graduation rates at UAA are concerning.

10. Finally, connectedness to their heritage culture is critical for Alaska Native student success and a culturally-congruent and non-threatening mode of support such as the TC has the potential to help students overcome the various barriers and stressors they face to succeed in college.

To this end, this dissertation research investigated the potential effectiveness of the TC in facilitating adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing college among Alaska Native students at UAA. Given the potential utility of the TC for Alaska Native Peoples, the study hoped to contribute to the foundation of empirical literature concerning the use and effectiveness of circles among Alaska's indigenous Peoples by initially exploring their effectiveness among Alaska Native college students. Ultimately, it is hoped that the results of this study will contribute toward establishing a body of empirically-based literature on the effectiveness and benefits of TCs, which in turn can lead to the increased use of and support for TCs when working with Alaska Native Peoples.

Chapter Three Methodology

Cultural Advisory Committee

A key element in this study was the involvement of a cultural advisory committee throughout the research project. The advisory committee was accessed by the researcher through the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) Behavioral Health program staff, which includes Alaska Native elders, leaders, and specialists within the field of behavioral health. The researcher sought and received support from Alaska Native leaders and elders within the community to demonstrate respect to the culture and community while leading to positive relationships. Input from community members and cultural advisors were considered throughout the study, from the selection of the research topic, the research design, participant recruitment, and to the presentation of the results.

Design Overview

The study utilized an experimental, pre-/post-test comparison group design. This design was chosen to compare two similar group “counseling” activities - Indigenous Talking Circles (TCs) and Mainstream Support Groups (MSGs) - and to determine which group activity works better in facilitating adjustment to college life and academic performance among a sample of Alaska Native college students. The research question was: *“Are Talking Circles more effective than Mainstream Support Groups in facilitating adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing college among Alaska Native college students?”* The primary hypothesis was that TCs would be more effective than MSGs in facilitating adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to college among Alaska Native students at UAA. As

additional hypotheses, it was also predicted that participants in the TCs will report being heard better and more satisfied with their group than participants in the MSGs.

Furthermore, it was hypothesized that TCs would be regarded as more helpful and more culturally sensitive than the MSG.

Participant Recruitment

The inclusion criteria to participate were:

1. Must be 18 years or older and residing in Alaska, and a student at UAA.
2. Must identify with Alaska Native ancestry, (i.e., Tlingit, Haida, Tshimshian, Athabascan, Aleut, Aleutiq, Yupik, Eyak and Inupiaq).
3. Must claim to be proficient in the English language.
4. Other desired, but not required, participant characteristics included being a first time or returning freshman student from rural Alaska.

Participants were recruited at the UAA campus during the 2012 Fall semester *Annual Student Kick-Off* event, through Residence Life (community living environment on the UAA campus), word of mouth, recruitment flyers, and via referrals from the UAA Native Student Services, and three programs that focus on student success among Alaska Native students in specific disciplines: Recruiting and Retention of Alaska Natives into Nursing, Alaska Native Science and Engineering, and Alaska Native Community Advancement in Psychology programs. Additional recruitment efforts occurred near the Native Student Services office, the Social Sciences Building, and the Camai Room (a place often used by students for a variety of social and academic functions) where all

students were offered informational flyers, fried bread, and an opportunity to sign-up to be a participant in the study.

All study recruitment materials (e.g., flyers, emails, etc.) contained the following language:

“I am conducting a research project on a variety of group activities aimed at helping Alaska Native students to adjust to college life successfully at UAA. To qualify for this study, you must be willing to participate in a total of three group sessions over the course of a semester at UAA. Interested individuals may contact the principal investigator via phone or email to express interest. All participants will be compensated for their time by receiving a gift card after completing each session (either a \$15 Subway gift card after the first two sessions or \$20 Starbucks gift card after the third and final session). In addition, participants will be eligible to enter a raffle for a \$200 gift card upon completing all three sessions to thank them for their time. Finally, as a part of the Alaska Native traditions and values of sharing, food and refreshments will be provided during each group meeting. Participation is completely voluntary.”

Participants

To determine the needed sample size, a power analysis was conducted for the planned Mixed-Model Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) using the G*Power 3 software (Faul, Erdfelder, & Buchner, 2007). With an estimated medium effect size of 0.25, an alpha level of 0.05, two independent groups (between subjects), and two points of measurement (within-subjects), the power analysis revealed that approximately 54

participants total would be needed for 95% power, the default power in the G*Power 3 software (Cohen, 1992).

Attempts were made to obtain as many participants as possible, with recruitment continuing until a few days before randomization had to be conducted and the first group sessions needed to be scheduled. The various recruitment methods yielded a total of 54 Alaska Native students at UAA who signed up for the study; and each of them was randomly assigned to one of two types of treatment condition (TC or MSG). Each treatment condition contained 27 students; and participants in each treatment condition were further divided into two groups per condition (two TC groups and two MSG groups), with each group having 13 or 14 students each. All participants were asked to attend three sessions of the group to which they were randomly assigned (each group is discussed in more detail below). By the time of the first group sessions, however, there were only 13 participants who attended the TC sessions (TC group 1 had 6 participants; TC group 2 had 7 participants) and only 22 participants who attended the MSG sessions (MSG group 1 had 10 participants; MSG group 2 had 12 participants) for total sample size of only 35 individuals. Of the 35 who attended the first group sessions, only 24 participants completed both Time 1 and Time 2 assessments (TC n=10; MSG n=13), further reducing the final sample size with which data analyses were conducted. Randomization procedures, attrition rates, and participant demographics are discussed in more detail in the results section.

As previously mentioned, two groups per treatment condition – all of which involved three sessions – were facilitated over the course of three consecutive months

(around the end of September, the end of October, and the end of November) during UAA's Fall 2012 semester. All participants were asked to complete measures of adjustment to college life and academic performance (such as self-reported grades) before the first group session and after the last group session, along with additional questions about their experiences with the groups to which they were assigned (e.g., satisfaction with group, cultural sensitivity of group, etc.). The measures used for the study are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Measures

The measures for this study included a Demographic Questionnaire, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1999), Pre-test Questionnaire, Post-test Questionnaire, and Student Performance Survey. Each of these measures is described in more detail below.

Demographic Questionnaire. This questionnaire's purpose was to document participants' sex, age, tribe, and place of origin. The demographic questionnaire was administered as part of the Time 1 survey (see Appendix C).

Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). The SACQ is a 67-item self-report tool that attempts to determine how a student is handling the demands of college life (Baker & Siryk, 1999). It focuses on four specific areas:

1. Academic Adjustment (24 items)—which includes statements such as “I know why I'm in college and what I want out of it” and “My academic goals and purposes are well defined;”

2. Personal-Emotional Adjustment (15 items)—which includes statements such as “I have been feeling tense or nervous lately” and “Lately, I have been feeling blue and moody;”
3. Social Adjustment (20 items)—which includes statements such as “I feel that I fit in well as part of the college environment” and “I am very involved with social activities in college;” and
4. Attachment to the Situation (15 items)—which includes statements such as “I am pleased now about my decision to go to college” and “Lately I have been giving a lot of thought to dropping out of college altogether and for good.”

Students responded to each statement on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 = *applies very closely to me* to 9 = *doesn't apply to me at all*. Lower scores on the SACQ have been correlated with more struggles with college life and a higher likelihood of dropping-out; whereas, higher scores on the SACQ likely indicate better adjustment to college (Baker & Siryk, 1984).

This tool has been normed on a mixed gender and mixed race sample of over 1,300 college freshmen. The normative sample, however, was limited to only one college institution—Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts (Baker & Siryk, 1999). The SACQ was administered at the University of Alaska Anchorage by Schultz (2008), where 13.9% of participants in the sample were of Alaska Native descent. Based on coefficient alpha values from both of these studies, the SACQ seems to have satisfactory internal consistency. Specifically, alphas ranged from: .81 to .90 for the Academic Adjustment subscale; .83 to .91 for the Social Adjustment subscale; .77 to .86

for the Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale; .85 to .91 for the Attachment subscale; and .92 to .95 for the Full Scale (Baker & Siryk, 1999; Schultz, 2008). Past administrations of the SACQ have demonstrated theoretically-consistent inter-correlations between the subscales and the Full Scale. Such correlations indicate a common construct, but remain small enough to conceptualize the construct as represented by different subscales (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Finally, evidence supporting the SACQ's criterion-related validity is suggested by its statistically significant and theoretically-consistent correlations with real-life behaviors (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

The SACQ was a part of both Time 1 and Time 2 surveys; and some example items from this measure are presented in Appendix D. (The SACQ is a copyrighted tool, and thus, the entire scale cannot be copied and presented here.) In this study, the responses to the 24, 15, 20, and 15 items of the Academic Adjustment subscale, the Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale, the Social Adjustment subscale, and the Attachment to the Situation subscale, respectively, were averaged into four subscale scores (also ranging from 1 to 9). The SACQ Full Scale score was not used for the current study because the scale developers (Baker & Syrik, 1999) recommended that the subscale scores be used for better interpretation. For the current study's sample, the obtained Cronbach's alphas for each of the SACQ subscales during Time 1 assessment were .87 (Academic Adjustment), .88 (Social Adjustment), .85 (Personal-Emotional Adjustment) and .81 (Attachment to Situation). For Time 2 assessment, the alphas were .79 (Academic), .80 (Social), .87 (Personal-Emotional), and .83 (Attachment).

Additional (Time 1) Questions. This set of questions was written to capture participants' expectations or desires prior to the study. Example questions include: "Please rate your expectations that participating in a group on college life adjustment will be helpful;" "Please rate how important it is to you for services to be culturally sensitive to Alaska Native cultural traditions and values;" and "Please rate your level of commitment to completing your college education and remaining in college." The response options used Likert-type scales ranging from 1 = "*it will not be helpful*," "*not important at all*," or "*not committed at all*" to 9 = "*it will be extremely helpful*," "*extremely important*," or "*extremely committed*." There were also some open-ended questions to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses honestly and freely. These questions and response scales are attached as Appendix E.

Additional (Time 2) Questions. This set of questions was created to capture participants' opinions about their experiences in participating in either the TC or MSG treatment groups. Example questions include: "How satisfied were you with your college life adjustment group?"; "How helpful was your college life adjustment group?"; "How culturally sensitive to your Alaska Native cultural traditions and values was your college life adjustment group?"; and "How committed to completing your college education and remaining in college do you feel since participating in your college life adjustment group?" The response options included Likert-type scales ranging from 1 = "*I was not at all satisfied*," "*it was not at all helpful*," "*not sensitive*," "*not heard*," "*not understood*," or "*not committed*" to 9 = "*I was extremely satisfied*," "*it was extremely helpful*," "*extremely sensitive*," "*well heard*," "*well understood*," or "*extremely committed*." There

were also some open-ended questions to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses honestly and freely. These questions are attached as Appendix F.

Student Performance Survey. Students self-reported their current grades, commitment to studying, GPAs, and the number of college credits on their school transcripts as a part of both (Time 1 and Time 2) surveys. The Student Performance Survey is attached as Appendix G.

Procedures

All Participants. Once potential participants expressed their interest in the study, the principal investigator screened interested participants for the selection criteria outlined above. Qualified participants were randomly assigned to the TC or MSG group until all slots for each condition were filled. Their names were assigned a number from 1-54 and entered into an online research randomizer program (Urbaniak & Plous, 2011). The groups were scheduled to meet either at a conference room or classroom located on the UAA campus. Group sessions were scheduled during a date and time convenient for all participants, the primary investigator, and the co-investigator. The co-investigator was an Alaska Native student in the Joint Clinical-Community Ph.D. program at the University of Alaska. The co-investigator was the co-facilitator of the TC and MSG group sessions; and his primary responsibility was to observe and document field notes for comparison with the primary investigators' own observations and field notes. In addition, the co-investigator/co-facilitator was responsible for debriefing with the primary investigator after each group session to ensure the fidelity of the group processes. Both the investigator and co-investigator held a Master of Science degree in Clinical

Psychology and had experience facilitating psychotherapy/student groups at UAA with Alaska Native students.

When participants initially met for the first session, they received a consent form (Appendix A) along with the Time 1 survey (Appendix C, D, E, & G). Consent forms and Time 1 surveys were completed before the first group session began. All groups took place in a room with chairs formed into a circle. When participants arrived they were greeted by the primary investigator or co-facilitator. A full meal was provided for each group. The structure and expectations during each of the groups were as follows:

1) welcome and meals; 2) introduction, review, and expectations; 3) group process; and 4) conclusions and debriefing opportunities. At the end of the third session for both the TC and MSG conditions, all participants were asked to complete the Time 2 survey (Appendix D, F, & G). Each of the three group sessions lasted between 90-120 minutes.

Talking Circle Condition. The first TC session began with the facilitator providing an explanation and brief overview of TCs and what participants can expect. Next, ground rules were established by the group. A talking piece was introduced and its meaning was explained to the group. The facilitator began the process going clockwise with the first round demonstrated by the facilitator. Each TC session encompassed three rounds signifying a beginning, middle, and end, which also represents the unity of mind, body, and spirit. During the introduction round, participants were asked for information about themselves such as:

- What is your name?
- What is your tribe?

- Who is your family?
- Where is your home town and where did you grow up? and
- Is there anything you feel empowered to say?

The topic of the second round was introduced as “experiences with adjustment to college life” and what that has been like for students. However, the TC typically takes a life of its own, meaning that the energy in the TC may lead towards topics that seem off track but relate in a holistic and more global way, during which students were allowed to talk about whatever topic they wished. The third and final round of every TC session focused on closure. The third round involved each participant commenting on what they learned about themselves as it related to the topic of discussion (in this case, adjustment to college life) and how they would apply such insight to their lives. However, just like all rounds of the TC, participants were welcomed to say whatever came to their mind in the moment.

The second and third scheduled TC session topics were established by the themes resulting from the first TC session. During all the TC sessions, participants were not allowed to cross talk to one another and the process was facilitated using a talking piece, wherein, whoever had the talking piece had the floor and everyone’s full attention. Although a planned duration period was mentioned, TC’s are semi-structured with all sessions having flexibility to end later depending on the flow of the group process. Finally, all TC sessions were ended with a closing prayer, which lasted for about 1-2 minutes.

Mainstream Support Group Condition. The Supporting Students of Color on Campus (SSCC) program (Steen et al., 2011) was used as the MSG for the current study because Fitch and Marshall (2011) report that it has been used at other universities and is aimed specifically at college students who are ethnic or racial minorities. The SSCC is composed of various culturally-relevant activities, processing questions, and teaching strategies to facilitate ethnic and cultural minority college students' personal, social, and academic functioning (Steen et al., 2011). Some studies have shown that the components of the SSCC tend to facilitate improved belief in solving problems, belief in academic ability, and motivation and focus to do well in school (Steen, 2011; Steen & Bemak, 2008). Steen and Bemak (2008) also found that the SSCC was regarded by students as comfortable and as helpful in normalizing their struggles and generating ideas for helping themselves and others. The current study, however, is the first to use the SSCC with an Alaska Native college student sample.

The SSCC is outlined based on seven structured group sessions: Session One - Introduction & Ground Rules; Session Two - Brief Review, Acquaintance and Individual Goals; Session Three - Brief Review and Self-Advocacy; Session Four - Brief Review and Self-Concept; Session Five - Brief Review, Empowerment, and Self-Regulation; Session Six - Brief Review and Internal and External Assets; and Session Seven - Brief Review of the Entire Group, Identification of Support Networks, and Closure. To make it consistent with the three-session TC condition, the SSCC was divided into a total of three sessions with Sessions One and Two of SSCC becoming Session One of the MSG, Sessions Three and Four of the SSCC becoming Session Two of the MSG, and Sessions

Five, Six and Seven of the SSCC becoming Session Three of the MSG. Because of the various contents prescribed in the SSCC manual, the MSG sessions were more structured with a prescribed 90 minute session than the TC sessions. A break-down of each MSG session is further described in Table 3.

Table 3

Mainstream Support Group; Supporting Students of Color on Campus (SSCC)

Session 1: Introduction, Ground Rules and Confidentiality/Consent Paperwork Session 2: Brief Review, Acquaintance and Individual Goals	
Objective	To meet and greet, create ground rules, review expectations, process consent/confidentiality paperwork, team build and explore individual goals.
Materials Needed	Poster paper, markers and consent/confidentiality paperwork.
Opening/ Introduction	Students will discuss reasons they think they are attending the group, explore ways to be successful in college, learn strategies for dealing with issues common among college students, define a goal to accomplish this semester and continue to get to know one another.
Activities	Introductions via ice breaker—pair students up and have them ask the following information and report back to the group (include name, origination, siblings, major, after graduation). Afterwards, ask follow-up questions such as, “Did you take any risks”, “What did you get out of this activity”, or “How well did you get to know your partner”, reinforce confidentiality and complete consent/ confidentiality paperwork and generate ground rules (post them in the room). Finally, have students define a goal and how they will accomplish that goal this semester.
Closure	Remind date/time of future sessions, have students share an insight of today’s group and encourage student to look up the definition of self-advocacy and self-concept.
Session 3: Brief Review and Self-Advocacy Session 4: Brief Review and Self-Concept	
Objective	To review the prior session, generate a definition of self-advocacy, explore strategies for self-advocacy, generate a definition for self-concept, explore academic and personal self-concept, generate a definition of empowerment and discuss self-regulatory strategies.
Materials Needed	Poster paper, markers and blank paper.
Opening/Brief Review	Ask students for an update on their personal goal, opportunity to share definitions of self-advocacy/self-concept/empowerment, strategies to advocate for themselves or self-regulatory strategies that are useful in college and explore academic and personal perceptions of themselves.
Activities	Share self-advocacy definitions and come up with one defined by the overall group to be written on poster paper, provide examples of challenges and barriers in college and discuss strategies for overcoming challenges; do the same for self-concept and differentiate between academic and personal self-concept. Have students write positive and negative concepts of self and be sure to include their names. Then have each student develop positive and areas of improvement regarding another individuals personal attributes and their academic characteristics, repeat this process 2-3 times. Afterwards discuss, “what was learned”, “was it difficult being honest when writing about others”, “how does this relate to academic self-concept.”

Closure	Remind students about the date of the next session and have students share one insight from this group.
Session 5: Brief Review, Empowerment, and Self-Regulation Session 6: Brief Review and Internal and External Assets Session 7: Brief Review, Identification of Support Networks, and Closure	
Objective	To review the previous session, acknowledge personal strengths, discover support networks within and outside of the university system, to review status of individual goals and to complete post-survey.
Materials Needed	Poster paper and markers.
Opening/Brief Overview	Ask students to update on their personal goals (regardless if they have accomplished them or not), discuss definitions of internal and external assets, empowerment and self-regulation and brainstorm about support networks.
Activities	Share definitions of internal and external assets and come up with one defined by the overall group to be written on poster paper, brainstorm support networks within and outside of the university system, identify barriers which prevent students from connecting with others and open review all sessions during this study. Invite a guest speaker on how to write college level essays, take exams, and studying large volumes of materials.
Closure	Share final insights, encourage new relationships to continue and remind students to complete the post-survey.

Data and sample management

Each interested individual was assigned a number from 1 through 54 that was documented on a master list. The master list was kept in a securely stored and locked file cabinet separated from the completed surveys located at the University Alaska Anchorage Psychology Ph.D. Program offices. Participants were required to write their assigned numbers on their surveys. The master list was accessed only if participants forgot their assigned numbers. Assigned numbers helped track the surveys and assured that they could be matched accurately between Time 1 and Time 2. All data were entered into and analyzed with the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS; formerly known as Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software.

To minimize the attrition rate of participants throughout the duration of the study, multiple outreach methods were used, including reminder phone calls, text messages, and emails. Also as mentioned earlier, incentives for participation were also provided such as

meals during the group sessions and gift cards (a \$15 Subway gift cards at the end of participating in the first and second sessions and a \$20 Starbucks after participating in the third/final session for those students who completed all three sessions). Participants were also reminded that they would become eligible for a \$200 gift card raffle upon completing the third and final group session.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The independent variables in this study were Type of Treatment (Talking Circle or Mainstream Support Group) and Time (Time 1/pretest vs. Time 2/posttest). The dependent variables were: (a) the SACQ Academic Adjustment, Personal-Emotional Adjustment, Social Adjustment, and Attachment to the situation subscales; (b) the Student Performance Survey; and (c) questions about participants' experiences with their group. For the SACQ, items were averaged when creating subscale scores. For the central analyses, a series of 2 (Type of Treatment X 2 (Time) mixed-model ANOVAs were conducted with the obtained SACQ scores, student performance, and commitment to completing college questions as dependent variables. Five independent samples t-tests were conducted on Time 2 data to test differences between the TC and MSG groups in terms of: (1) the helpfulness of their group; (2) the extent to which they felt their culture was understood by their group; (3) the extent to which they felt heard by their group; (4) their satisfaction with their group; and (5) the cultural sensitivity of their group.

Qualitative Data Analysis

No formal qualitative analysis was conducted. Responses to the open-ended questions and the investigator's/co-investigator's notes were simply used to supplement and further contextualize the quantitative findings in this study.

Specific Hypotheses for this Study

The following 11 hypotheses were tested. Hypotheses 1-6 were tested using a series of 2 X 2 mixed-model ANOVAs for each dependent variable, and hypotheses 7-11 were tested using five independent samples t-tests on Time 2 data.

H1: It was hypothesized that the mean SACQ Academic Adjustment subscale score would increase more for the TC group than for the MSG group from Time 1 to Time 2, suggesting that TCs are more effective than MSGs in facilitating academic adjustment among Alaska Native college students.

H2: It was hypothesized that the mean SACQ Social Adjustment subscale score would increase more for the TC group than for the MSG group from Time 1 to Time 2, suggesting that TCs are more effective than MSGs in facilitating social adjustment among Alaska Native college students.

H3: It was hypothesized that the mean SACQ Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale score would increase more for the TC group than for the MSG group from Time 1 to Time 2, suggesting that TCs are more effective than MSGs in facilitating personal-emotional adjustment among Alaska Native college students.

H4: It was hypothesized that the mean SACQ Attachment Adjustment subscale score would increase more for the TC group than for the MSG group from Time 1 to

Time 2, suggesting that TCs are more effective than MSGs in facilitating attachment adjustment among Alaska Native college students.

H5: It was hypothesized that improvements in TC participants' academic performance would be greater than those in the MSG group as measured by the Student Performance Survey at Time 2.

H6: It was hypothesized that the TC group's commitment to completing their college education would be higher than the MSG group's commitment to completing their college education at Time 2, suggesting that TCs had more impact than MSGs in facilitating commitment to education among Alaska Native college students.

H7: At Time 2, students in the TC group would report that their group sessions were more culturally sensitive in comparison to the MSG participants' evaluation of the cultural sensitivity of their group sessions.

H8: At Time 2, students in the TC group would report that their group sessions were more helpful to them in comparison to the MSG participants' evaluation of the helpfulness of their group sessions.

H9: At Time 2, students in the TC group would have a higher evaluation of the extent to which their group understood their culture compared to the MSG participants' evaluation of the extent to which their group understood their culture.

H10: At Time 2, students in the TC group would report being more satisfied with their support group experiences than students in the MSG group.

H11: At Time 2, students in the TC group would report being heard better by their support group than students in the MSG group.

Chapter Four Results

Participation and Attrition Rates

A total of 54 students initially signed up to participate in the study. After recruitment was completed, qualified participants were randomly assigned to the TC or MSG group until all slots for each condition were equally divided. After randomization, all 54 individuals who signed up for the study were provided with a courtesy email, text message, or phone call to confirm their availability or provide them the option to be assigned to another cohort that worked for their schedule. The 54 individuals were not aware of their group assignments. Dates and times for group sessions were scheduled based on room availability, around the UAA calendar of events (e.g., midterms, Thanksgiving break, etc.), and the primary investigator's/co-investigator's availability. After random assignment, a total of 19 students either did not respond to follow-up communication attempts (i.e., emails, voicemails, or text messages) or had scheduling conflicts that prevented them from participating in the study. Thus, a total of 35 student participants were left (attendance rate of 64.8%), with 13 participants in the TC groups (TC group A=6; TC group B=7) and 22 participants in the MSG groups (MSG group A=10; MSG group B=12).

Attrition transpired over the course of the three sessions for each group. Out of the 35 participants who attended the first session, a total of 18 completed all three sessions (69% of TC participants; 45% of MSG participants) and six attended the first and last sessions (1 TC and 5 MSG), combining for a final total sample size of 24 participants (68.5% study completion rate). Ten out of the 13 original TC participants

(76.9% study completion rate) and 14 out of the 22 original MSG participants (63.6%) completed the study. A chi-square test revealed, however, that the difference in completion rates between the two groups was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 0.67, p = .413$. Participants who did not complete the study provided a variety of legitimate reasons for their absences such as family affairs (e.g., death in the family, transportation issues) and various scheduling conflicts due to other school-related priorities. Although discussed further in the limitations section, it is important to note at this point that the final total sample size (i.e., $N=24$) is substantially lower than the minimum sample size recommended by the power analysis (i.e., 54). Thus, the small final total sample size may have influenced the results and should be considered when interpreting the findings presented below.

Participant Demographics

Among the final 24 participants who completed both Time 1 and Time 2 assessments, 15 were women (62.5%) and nine were men (37.5%) with the final sample's overall mean age being 23.33 years ($SD=5.32$). A final total of 10 women (71.4%) and four men completed their participation in the MSG groups, combining for 14 final MSG condition participants. The MSG participants had a mean age of 23.86 years ($SD=6.04$). A final total of five women (50.0%) and five men completed their participation in the TC groups, combining for 10 final TC condition participants. The TC participants had a mean age of 22.60 years ($SD=4.33$). An independent-samples t-test found that the average age of the participants between the two conditions did not differ significantly, $t(22) = 0.562, p = .580$. Additionally, a chi-square test suggested that there was no

statistically significant difference between the final MSG and final TC conditions in terms of sex, $\chi^2(1) = 0.41, p = .521$. The final 24 participants' communities of origin are listed in Table 4, showing that except for one participant from Seattle, Washington, all participants identified as hailing from various parts of Alaska with 75% of the final participants being from rural Alaska.

Table 4

Participants' Communities of Origin by the 24 Final Participants

Community of Origin	<i>n</i> (percentage)	Community of Origin	<i>n</i> (percentage)
Alakanuk*	1 (4%)	Noatak*	1 (4%)
Anchorage	4 (16%)	Nome*	1 (4%)
Bethel*	1 (4%)	Seattle, WA	1 (4%)
Dillingham*	2 (8%)	Sitka*	1 (4%)
False Pass*	2 (8%)	St. Mary's*	1 (4%)
Galena*	1 (4%)	St. Paul*	4 (16%)
Kalskag*	1 (4%)	Unalakleet*	1 (4%)
LaPush	1 (4%)	Wasilla	1 (4%)

Note. *Denotes a rural Alaska community.

Independent samples t-tests were also conducted to compare the mean ratings of the final 24 participants in the two conditions on their Time 1 (pre-test) responses for all variables (the four SACQ subscale scores, and the three additional questions about expectations, importance of cultural sensitivity, and commitment to completing college). These analyses produced no statistically significant differences (see Table 5). The lack of statistically significant differences in the demographic and the measured variables during Time 1 between the two conditions suggests that the randomization procedure was

effective in equalizing the two conditions and in controlling for these potential confounding variables.

Table 5

Comparison of Mean Ratings of Final 24 Participants on Pre-test Variables

Pre-test Variable	<u>Group <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)</u>		<i>T</i>	<i>Df</i>	Sig.
	MSG (<i>n</i> =14)	TC (<i>n</i> =10)			
Expectations of participating in the group	7.28 (1.48)	7.10 (1.28)	.318	22	.753
Importance of culturally sensitive services	8.28 (1.13)	7.40 (2.27)	1.262	22	.220
Commitment to completing college	8.71 (0.73)	8.50 (1.08)	.583	22	.566
SACQ Academic Adjustment	6.46 (1.13)	6.53 (1.13)	-.162	22	.873
SACQ Social Adjustment	6.57 (1.14)	7.12 (0.94)	-1.256	22	.222
SACQ Personal Emotional Adjustment	5.98 (1.47)	6.61 (1.24)	-1.102	22	.282
SACQ Attachment to Situation	7.23 (1.01)	7.13 (1.39)	.213	22	.833

Note. MSG = Mainstream Support Group; TC = Talking Circle. *Standard deviations are in parentheses.* SACQ = Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire— 9-Point scale with 1 = *Doesn't Apply to me at All* and 9 = *Applies Very Closely to Me*; Other Pre-test Variables— 9-Point scale with 1 = *it will not be helpful, not important at all, or not committed at all* to 9 = *it will be extremely helpful, extremely important, or extremely committed*.

Central Analyses

The final set of dependent variables that were assessed during Time 1 and Time 2 included the four SACQ subscale scores and a question about students' level of commitment to completing their college education. Other dependent variables that were assessed only during Time 2 include five questions about participants' experiences (e.g., satisfaction level, helpfulness of group, etc.). At this point, it is important to note that questions about academic performance (e.g., course grades, assignments turned in, missed classes, etc.) were also completed during Time 1 and Time 2 assessments. However, participants had a difficult and confusing time completing such questions during both assessment times and, thus, such data were unreliable, incomplete, or not

interpretable. Therefore, these “academic performance” questions were not included in the final set of dependent variables. Consequently, H5 could not be tested, and these data are not presented in this dissertation.

Effects on SACQ Academic Adjustment Scores. To test H1 on academic adjustment, a 2 (Time: Pretest vs. Posttest) x 2 (Type of Treatment: TC vs. MSG) mixed-model ANOVA was computed with SACQ Academic Adjustment scores as the dependent variable. As presented in Figure 1, the ANOVA revealed no significant effect of Time on Academic Adjustment, $F(1, 22) = 3.050, p = .095, \eta_p^2 = .122$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .386. There was also no main effect of Type of Treatment on Academic Adjustment scores, $F(1, 22) = .229, p = .637, \eta_p^2 = .010$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .074. Finally, there was no interaction effect on Academic Adjustment, $F(1, 22) = .136, p = .716, \eta_p^2 = .006$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .064. These findings suggest that H1 was not supported.

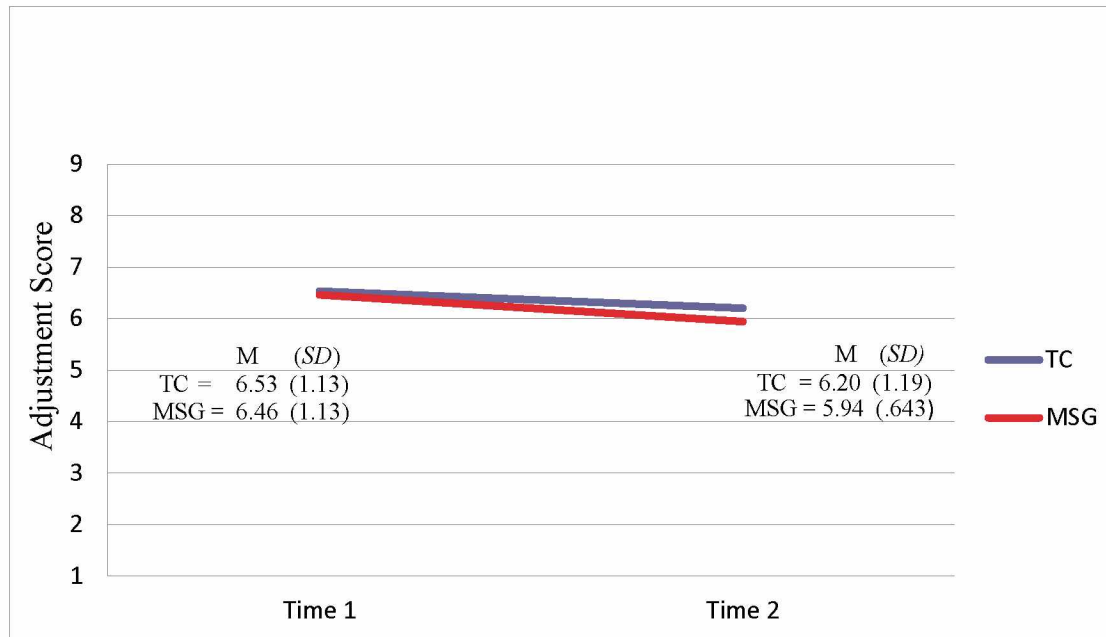


Figure 1. Mean academic adjustment scores by time and group. *Note.* A comparison of Academic Adjustment scores between TC and MSG participants during Time 1 and Time 2 assessment. TC = Talking Circle; MSG = Mainstream Support Group.

Effects on SACQ Social Adjustment Scores. To test H2 on social adjustment, a 2 (Time: Pretest vs. Posttest) x 2 (Type of Treatment: TC vs. MSG) mixed-model ANOVA was computed with SACQ Social Adjustment score as the dependent variable. As shown in Figure 2, the ANOVA revealed no significant effect of Time on Social Adjustment, $F(1, 22) = 1.336, p = .260, \eta_p^2 = .057$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .198. There was also no main effect of Type of Treatment on Social Adjustment scores, $F(1, 22) = 1.263, p = .273, \eta_p^2 = .054$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .189. Finally, there was no interaction effect on Social Adjustment, $F(1, 22) = .489, p = .492, \eta_p^2 = .022$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .103. These findings suggest that H2 was not supported.

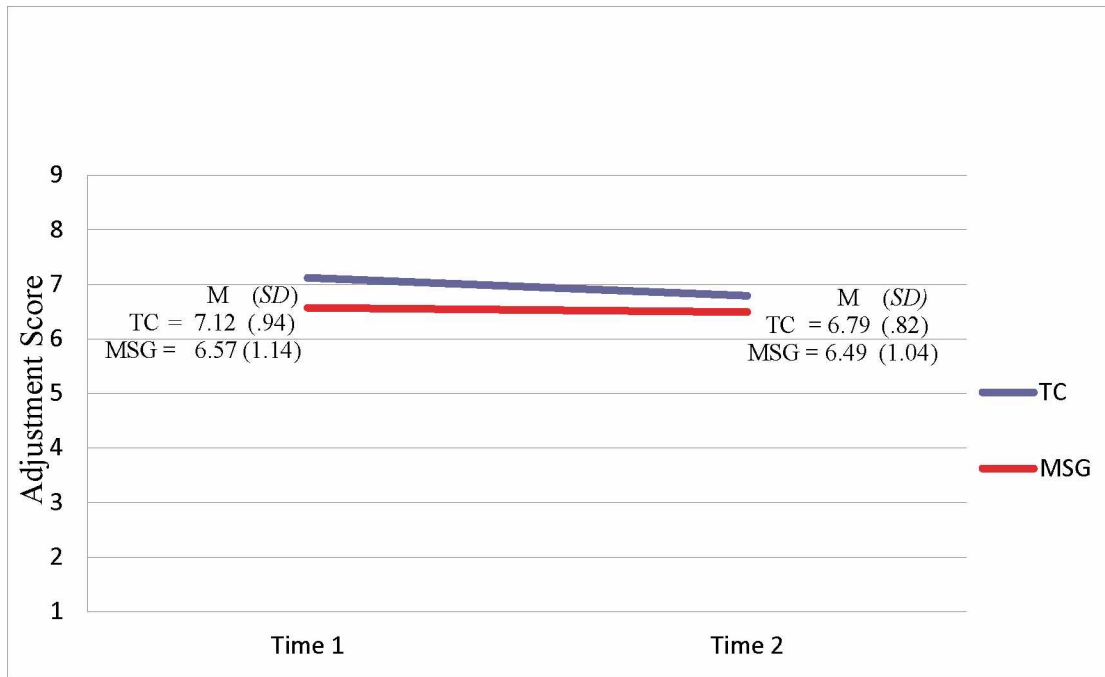


Figure 2. Mean social adjustment scores by time and group. *Note.* A comparison of Social Adjustment scores between TC and MSG participants during Time 1 and Time 2 assessment. TC = Talking Circle; MSG = Mainstream Support Group.

Effects on SACQ Personal-Emotional Adjustment Scores. To test H3 on personal-emotional adjustment a 2 (Time: Pretest vs. Posttest) \times 2 (Type of Treatment: TC vs. MSG) mixed-model ANOVA was computed with SACQ Personal-Emotional Adjustment scores as the dependent variable. As shown in Figure 3, the ANOVA revealed a significant effect of Time on Personal-Emotional Adjustment, $F(1, 22) = 6.421, p = .019, \eta_p^2 = .226$, with both the TC and MSG conditions showing declines in their Personal-Emotional Adjustment scores. Statistical power to detect the effect was .678. There was no main effect of Type of Treatment on Personal-Emotional Adjustment scores, $F(1, 22) = 1.098, p = .306, \eta_p^2 = .048$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .171. Finally, there was no interaction effect on Personal-Emotional Adjustment, $F(1,$

22) = .059, $p = .810$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .056. These findings suggest that H3 was not supported.

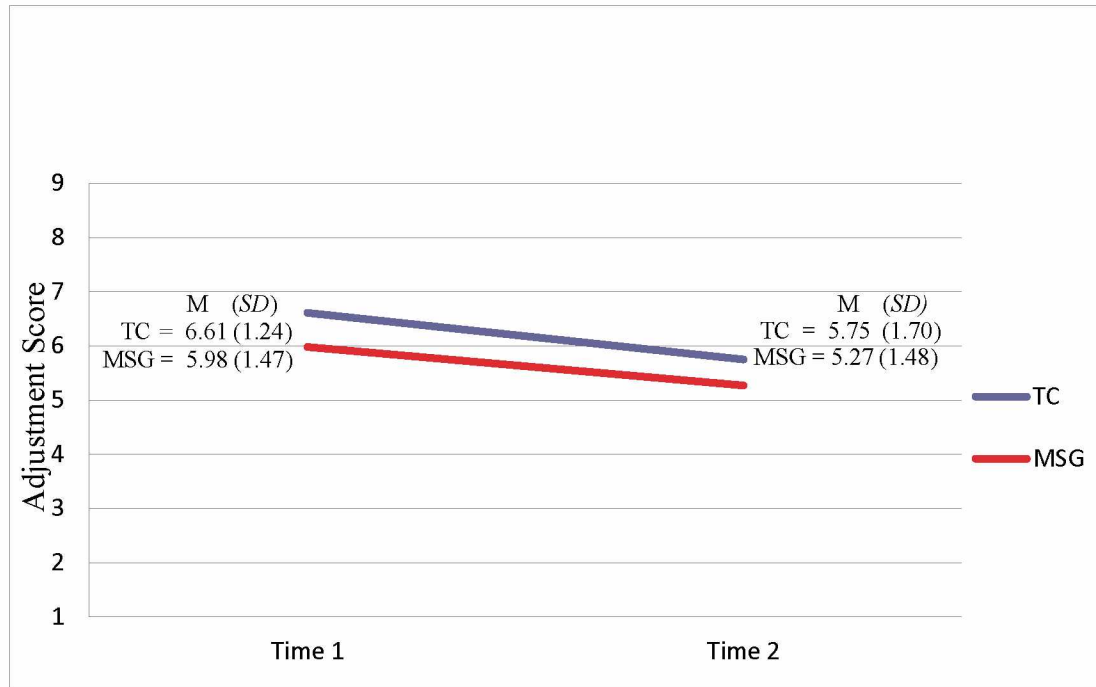


Figure 3. Mean personal-emotional adjustment scores by time and group. *Note.* A comparison of Personal-Emotional Adjustment scores between TC and MSG participants during Time 1 and Time 2 assessment. TC = Talking Circle; MSG = Mainstream Support Group.

Effects on SACQ Attachment to the Situation Adjustment Scores. To test H4, a 2 (Time: Pretest vs. Posttest) \times 2 (Type of Treatment: TC vs. MSG) mixed-model ANOVA was computed with SACQ Attachment to the Situation as the dependent variable. As presented in Figure 4, the ANOVA revealed no significant effect of Time on Attachment to the Situation, $F(1, 22) = .667$, $p = .423$, $\eta_p^2 = .029$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .122. There was no main effect of Type of Treatment on Attachment to the Situation Adjustment scores, $F(1, 22) = .003$, $p = .956$, $\eta_p^2 = .050$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .159. Finally, there was no interaction effect, F

(1, 22) = .393, $p = .537$, $\eta_p^2 = .018$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .092. These findings suggest that H4 was not supported.

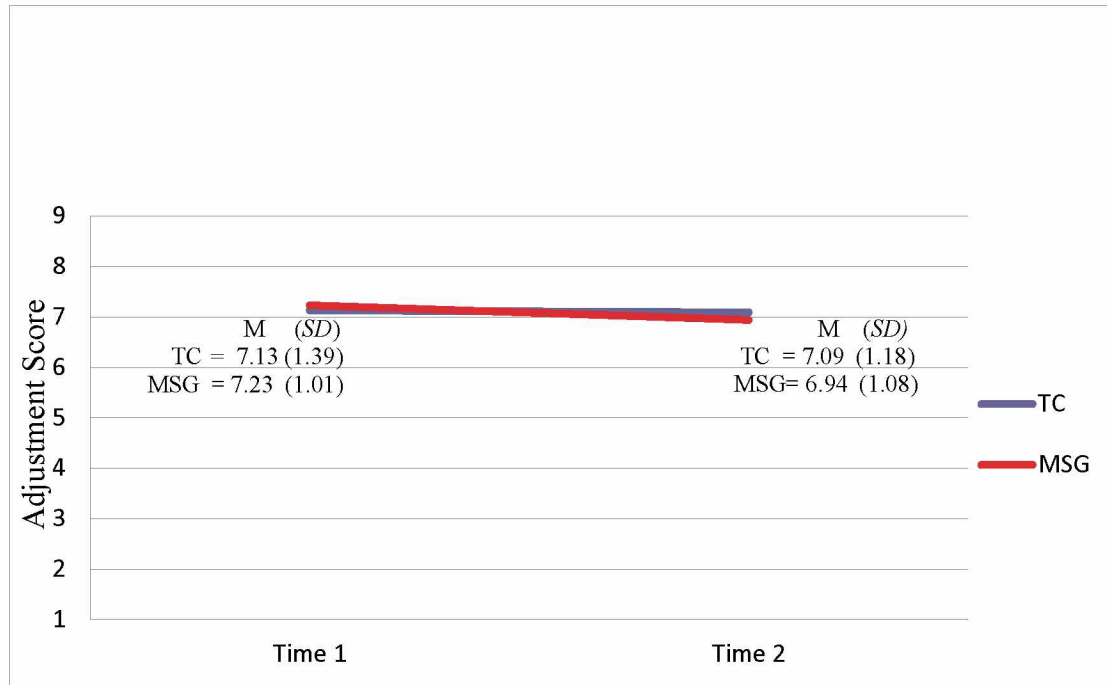


Figure 4. Mean attachment to the situation adjustment scores by time and group. *Note.* A comparison of Attachment to the situation scores between TC and MSG participants during Time 1 and Time 2 assessment. TC = Talking Circle; MSG = Mainstream Support Group.

Effect on Commitment to Completing College. To test H6, a 2 (Time: Pretest vs. Posttest) x 2 (Type of Treatment: TC vs. MSG) mixed-model ANOVA was computed with commitment to completing college score as the dependent variable. As shown in Figure 5, the ANOVA revealed no significant effect of Time on commitment to completing college, $F(1, 22) = .031$, $p = .862$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .053. There was no main effect of Type of Treatment on commitment to completing college, $F(1, 22) = .015$, $p = .903$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$. Statistical power to detect the effect was .159. Finally, there was no interaction effect, $F(1, 22) = .994$, $p = .330$, $\eta_p^2 =$

.043. Statistical power to detect the effect was .092. These findings suggest that H5 was not supported.

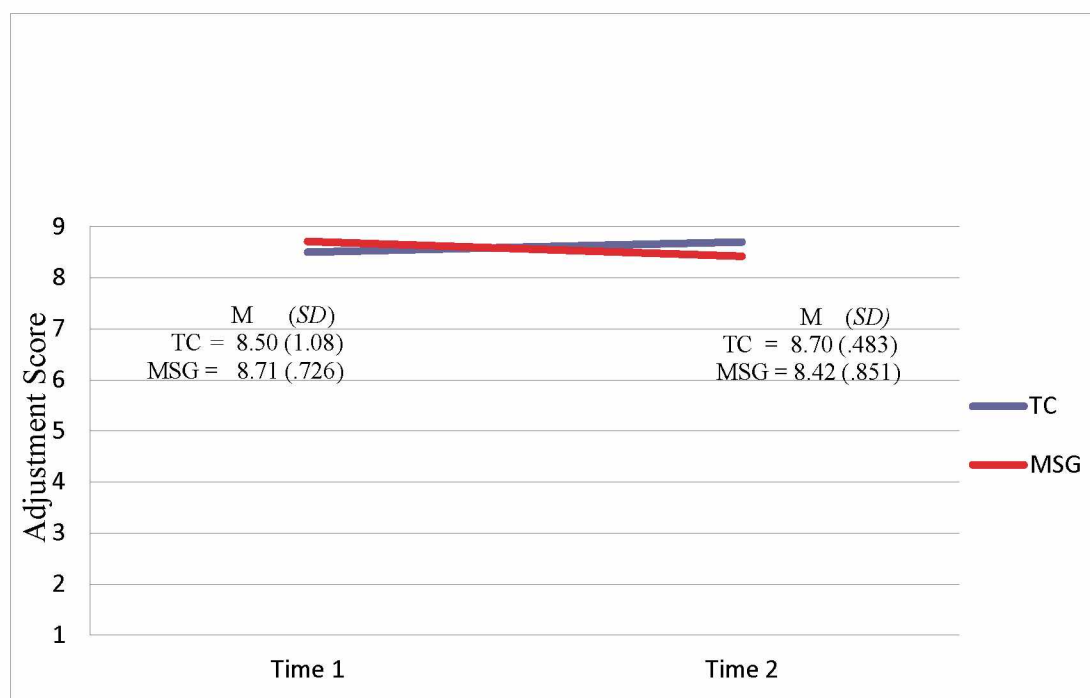


Figure 5. Mean commitment to completing college scores by time and group. *Note.* A comparison of commitment to completing college scores between TC and MSG participants during Time 1 and Time 2 assessment. TC = Talking Circle; MSG = Mainstream Support Group.

Effects on Other Time 2 Variables. In addition to the ANOVAs conducted on the variables that were assessed during both Time 1 and Time 2, the means of the MSG and TC groups on the five additional Time 2 (post-test only) questions (see Table 6) were also compared to assess hypotheses 7-11. Five independent samples t-tests (using a Levene's test to assess the homogeneity of variance assumption in all of them) were conducted. These findings suggest that H7 through H9 were not supported, but that H10 and H11 were supported.

Table 6

Additional Post-test (Time 2) Questions' Means between Groups

Post-test (Time 2) Question	<u>Group <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)</u>		<i>t</i> -value	Sig.
	MSG	TC		
How culturally sensitive was the group you participated in?	7.28 (1.89)	7.20 (2.48)	0.096	.924
How helpful was your group with adjustment to college life?	7.35 (1.82)	8.10 (.99)	-1.166	.256
How much was your culture understood in group?	7.50 (1.50)	7.90 (1.91)	-0.574	.572
What is your satisfaction with the group you participated in?	7.92 (1.20)	8.70 (.48)	-2.162	.044
How much did you feel you were heard in your group?	8.21 (1.18)	8.90 (.31)	-2.059	.057

Note. The response options for all questions was a 9-point Likert scale with 1= *not sensitive, it was not helpful at all, not understood, I was not at all satisfied, or not heard* to 9 = *extremely sensitive, it was extremely helpful, well understood, I was extremely satisfied, or well heard*; MSG = Mainstream Support Group; TC = Talking Circle.

Supplemental Qualitative Responses

In addition to the quantitative measures, TC and MSG participants were also asked to respond to a few open-ended questions. All the qualitative responses of participants in both the TC and MSG conditions are presented in Appendix H. As previously stated, no formal qualitative analysis was conducted. Responses to the open-ended questions were simply used to supplement the quantitative findings. Consistent with the quantitative findings presented above, there seems to be no clear difference between the participants in the two conditions regarding their experiences in and evaluations of their respective support groups. However, both TC and MSG participants' qualitative responses seem to be very positive, which seem to be inconsistent with the

obtained quantitative results suggesting that neither TCs nor MSGs benefitted the students. For example, when asked about the helpfulness of their group sessions, some students in the MSG condition wrote: *“This group opened me up, made more new friends I can hang out (with), feel more academic and motivated for college;”* *“I have met a lot of people who are in the same struggles I am in and it gives me hope to get through it and maintain motivation;”* *“This group format was helpful as a way to see that other students have trouble too and that even after some set-backs, you can still be successful;”* and *“Other’s thoughts and helpful tips will allow me to improve my study habits, life style in the future.”* Similarly, when asked about the helpfulness of their group sessions, some students in the TC condition wrote: *“It was good to talk about things that may be you couldn’t really talk about elsewhere. It was good to know you’re not alone;”* *“Very helpful in helping me realize I need to take time out of my busy life and spend some time with my family and make more time for myself.”* *“I needed to tell someone the strife I was going through. The group listened sincerely with no criticism or suggestions, only compassion, support and sympathy.”;* *“It gave me the tools I needed to identify my problems as a student and how I should fix them;”* *“People gave me great advice, and tips on how to stay motivated. The praise was nice also;”* and *“Was helpful to hear other people’s experiences and to share my own.”* These qualitative statements from TC and MSG participants suggest that they perceived both support groups as beneficial.

Summary of Results

In summary, the SACQ Academic Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Personal-Emotional Adjustment, and Attachment Adjustment subscale scores did not improve for either the TC or the MSG participants between Time 1 and Time 2. Also, commitment to complete college did not improve for either the TC or the MSG participants between Time 1 and Time 2. Furthermore, the four SACQ subscale scores were not significantly different between participants in the TC and the MSG conditions at Time 2 (post-test) assessment. Additionally, there were no statistically significant differences between the two conditions regarding the student participants' commitment to completing their college education, their ratings of their group's culturally sensitivity, their ratings of the helpfulness of their group, and their evaluations of the extent to which their culture was understood by their group. However, participants in the TCs seem to be more satisfied with their experience and felt that they were better heard than those who attended the MSG sessions. Thus, H1-H9 were not supported and no evidence was found to support the effectiveness of TCs in facilitating adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing college among Alaska Native students. Also, no evidence was found to suggest that TCs are more beneficial to Alaska Native college students than MSGs. Finally, the qualitative responses by participants in both conditions seem very positive, suggesting that they perceived their respective support groups as helpful.

Chapter Five Discussion

This study's purpose was to compare the effectiveness of TCs and MSGs for helping with adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing college among Alaska Native college students. Specifically, the TC was compared to the Supporting Students of Color on Campus program (SSCC), an example of an MSG that is recommended to college counselors as a culturally-sensitive support group for ethnic and cultural minority students. An experimental, pre-/post-test comparison group design was used to test the general hypothesis that both TCs and MSGs would improve adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing college among Alaska Native college students. Furthermore, it was predicted that Alaska Native college students who participated in a series of TCs would have better adjustment to college life scores than those who participated in a series of MSGs. It was also hypothesized that the students who participated in the TCs would have better academic performance, would be more strongly committed to completing their college education, report that their culture was better understood, perceive their group as more helpful, report being more satisfied with their group experiences, evaluate their group experiences as more culturally sensitive, and report being heard better by their group than students who participated in the MSG sessions. Of the 11 hypotheses, only the predictions about satisfaction levels and being heard better were supported by the findings. Thus, the current study was unable to obtain evidence that supports the effectiveness of TCs in improving adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing college among Alaska Native college students. Also, no

evidence was found to suggest that TCs were more beneficial to Alaska Native college students than MSGs.

In this final chapter, the discussions of the obtained results are presented in separate sections. First, some possible explanations for the lack of improvement in all of the measured variables by Time 2 assessment for both conditions will be provided. Next, the lack of differences between the two conditions in most of the measured variables by Time 2 will be discussed. This will be followed by some theoretical speculations about the few findings that may still provide a little hope regarding the potential benefits of TCs and MSGs. Then, a discussion of some service implications of the presented findings will be provided, followed by a delineation of the presented study's limitations and how future studies can address them. Finally, I will end with some final thoughts and hopes regarding the future use of TCs among Alaska Native Peoples.

Lack of Demonstrated Benefits of Both Conditions

The quantitative findings suggest that neither TCs nor MSGs were beneficial to the participants, contrary to H1-H9. In terms of the TC, it is possible that TCs are simply not effective for Alaska Native college students. The seeming lack of effectiveness of the TCs may be partly due to the degree of acculturation among the student participants in the TC condition. The majority of the TC participants' responses to the question "*Do you have experience with participating in talking circles or college student support groups?*" were either "*No*" or no response at all. Additionally, based on the researcher's impressions, process notes, and feedback from student participants, TCs were mostly unfamiliar to the students with only a few exceptions. Furthermore, those few students

who were familiar with TCs were also the students who openly described their strong connection to their heritage culture during group sessions. These process notes and qualitative responses, combined together, suggest that the majority of the TC participants may be highly Westernized, or at least not very well-connected to the Alaska Native culture, and this may have influenced the student participants' perceptions, experiences with, and evaluations of the TC sessions. Thus, it seems that TCs may not be effective for all Alaska Native individuals, particularly those who may be highly acculturated or are not very well-connected to their heritage culture. It is possible that Alaska Natives who are very much connected to their heritage culture, who are more familiar with TCs, or who believe in TCs may benefit more from participating in TCs. Future studies may explore these possibilities.

Not only was there no evidence that TCs helped students in this study, there was likewise no evidence that the MSG used in this study (i.e., the SSCC) was effective. Several things might explain this. First, it is possible that the facilitator's and co-facilitator's limited experience with conducting the SSCC contributed to its ineffectiveness. Second, the fact that the SSCC was compressed into three sessions for this study instead of the recommended seven sessions may have led to it being ineffective. Together, these first two factors may have compromised the integrity of the SSCC and, thus, may have led to its ineffectiveness in facilitating adjustment to college life and commitment to college. Third, there seems to be limited empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of the SSCC on other campuses despite the fact that it is included in an American Counseling Association publication intended for use by college

counselors as a guide for the group work that they do with students. Surprisingly, the effectiveness of the SSCC has yet to be rigorously investigated to the best of my knowledge. Specifically, other than evidence from non-standardized outcome measures (e.g., participants' perceived effectiveness, participants' belief in their abilities to solve problems, etc.), there is no known documented benefit of the SSCC using standardized outcome measures such as the SACQ, and there is no study showing that the SSCC improved any measured variable across time. Fourth, and finally, although the components of the SSCC have been previously used with students coming from various racial/ethnic groups, this support group has never been utilized with an Alaska Native sample before. Thus, the lack of effectiveness of the MSG used in this study may be due to the fact that it was not effective to begin with, especially for Alaska Native college students. Future studies that strictly adhere to the SSCC guidelines as conducted by experienced SSCC facilitators, however, may prove otherwise.

Lack of Differences Between Conditions

There were also no statistically significant differences between the TC and MSG conditions on most measures - including the cultural-sensitivity, being understood, and helpfulness questions - suggesting that TCs are not superior to MSGs across a variety of areas. These findings do not support H1-H9. The lack of differences between the two conditions may be explained by the fact that both TCs and MSGs were facilitated by the same person: the researcher. The researcher is an Alaska Native woman and all the student participants in both groups were Alaska Natives. The co-facilitator for both groups was also an Alaska Native man. The literature suggests that ethnic match

between service provider(s) and consumers tends to produce positive results such as better treatment outcomes, lower likelihood of dropping out of treatment (Sue, 1998), and remaining in treatment longer than those who are not matched ethnically with their providers (Sue, Fujino, Hu, Takeuchi, & Zane, 1991). Although neither the TC nor the MSG conditions increased levels of college adjustment and commitment to college, as discussed in the previous section, the qualitative findings do suggest that the TCs and the MSGs may have had some benefits in that participants in both groups perceived their sessions to be helpful. Such perceived benefits, as minimal as they may be, might be partly due to the ethnic match between the group participants and the group facilitators in both conditions, contributing to the lack of significant differences between conditions. Furthermore, the researcher was extensively trained by Alaska Native elders and culture-bearers to conduct TCs and was also trained in a clinical-community psychology doctoral program that has cultural responsiveness and sensitivity as strong emphases. Thus, the common facilitator between the two groups may have also contributed an Alaska Native flavor to both the TC and SSCC sessions, thereby leading to the equality of students' perceptions of, experiences in, and evaluations of the two types of support groups.

A Glimmer of Potential

As previously presented, neither the TC nor the MSG conditions improved adjustment to college life and commitment to completing college among a sample of Alaska Native students. Despite the seeming lack of effectiveness of both TCs and MSGs, however, the current study's results did provide some glimmer of hope for the benefits of both types of support groups. First, although the two conditions did not

improve levels of commitment to completing college, as shown in Figure 5 participants in both the TC and MSG conditions were already highly committed to completing college at the beginning of the study (Time 1 results). Thus, not very much improvement could really be made on this variable; and the finding that both TCs and MSGs maintained this high level of commitment during the course of an academic semester speaks well of both support groups. Second, previous research – some of which also used the SACQ – has found that college students tend to be overly optimistic regarding their preparedness for college at the beginning of a semester, a phenomenon referred to as the “matriculant myth” (Baker, McNeil, & Syrik, 1985; Buckley, 1971; Donato, 1973). Although studied primarily among freshmen and transfer college students, this phenomenon may be relevant for the current sample as well. Studies about the matriculant myth suggest that students tend to begin college semesters with a skewed perception of what it will be like and are generally excited about the upcoming semester, but they are usually not truly prepared for what is to come. Moreover, Baker et al. (1985) conducted a study using the SACQ to compare students pre-matriculation expectations with adjustment to college at the summer prior to the start of college, during the middle of their first semester, and during the middle of their second semester. They found statistically significant declines in SACQ scores from pre-matriculation to first mid-semester, and even more declines by the second mid-semester, suggesting that declines in SACQ scores across time tend to be common. The literature on matriculant myth, therefore, may partly explain the lack of improvements in SACQ scores for both TC and MSG participants at Time 2, and perhaps also explain the decline in the Personal-Emotional Adjustment scores for both conditions

at Time 2. That is, both conditions' Time 1 SACQ scores – which were assessed at the beginning of the semester – may have been overestimates of their actual levels of adjustment. Thus, given the literature on matriculant myth, the finding that three of the four adjustment to college life scores (all except for the Personal-Emotional Adjustment score) for both TC and MSG participants did not significantly decline during the course of an academic semester may speak well of both support groups. Third, college students also tend to become more stressed during the end of an academic semester as they attempt to complete course requirements, meet assignment deadlines, and prepare for final examinations (e.g., American College Health Association, 2009; Bolger, 1997). Thus, the finding that three of the four SACQ scores (all but the Personal-Emotional Adjustment scores) and commitment to completing college did not significantly decrease by Time 2 (last couple of weeks before the end of the semester), despite the likelihood that students were experiencing more stress at that time compared to Time 1 (beginning of the semester), may also speak well of both support groups. The preceding discussion about the possible but minimal benefits of TCs and MSGs, however, are mere theoretical speculations at this point and future research may directly test such suppositions. Nevertheless, the current study found no evidence to support the effectiveness of TCs or MSGs in facilitating adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing college.

Also, as previously presented, no evidence was found to support the hypotheses regarding the superiority of TCs over MSGs across a variety of variables (e.g., SACQ scores, commitment to college, cultural sensitivity, etc.). Indeed, even the qualitative

responses of TC and MSG participants did not reveal clear differences between the two types of support groups. However, there were two areas that produced statistically significant differences between the two conditions that may provide some support for the potential of TCs to be regarded as a beneficial and non-threatening service alternative for Alaska Native college students and Alaska Native Peoples more generally. Firstly, student participants' levels of satisfaction with the TCs were significantly higher compared to the levels of satisfaction of student participants in the MSGs. Furthermore, although the difference between conditions was not statistically significant, the finding that the TC condition had a higher study completion rate – or percentage of participants returning for the sessions – and a higher percentage of participants who completed all three sessions than the MSG condition, suggests that TC participants may have been more satisfied with their experience than MSG participants. Another area wherein a statistically significant difference was observed between the two conditions was the extent to which the student participants felt that they were heard. Student participants in the TC condition indicated that they were better heard than student participants in the MSG condition, which can also partly explain the higher level of satisfaction among TC participants.

Implications for Alaska Native Services

Although most of the hypotheses were not supported, the current study may still serve as an initial step for future programs and services for Alaska Natives to build upon. Indeed, the development of culturally appropriate programs and services focused on dealing with Alaska Native issues is sorely needed. Considering that the literature (as

discussed in Chapter Two) suggests that Alaska Native and American Indian Peoples do not prefer to seek services from Western models of mental health services (e.g., university counseling centers; one-on-one psychotherapy, etc.) and yet have some of the highest rates of psychological distress (Beals et al., 2005; Duran, 2006; Duran & Duran, 1995; Gone & Alcántara, 2007; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; Napoleon, 1996; Sullivan & Brems, 1997; Walls et al., 2006), TCs can perhaps offer a type of a less-threatening and more welcoming service alternative to this population. Indeed, the quantitative findings suggesting that TC participants felt that they were heard better by their group and that they were more satisfied with their group sessions provide support to this possibility. In addition, although the chi-square test was not statistically significant, the finding that more students in the TC condition completed their sessions and that the TC condition had a higher study completion rate than the MSG condition, may also support the notion that TCs may be perceived as more welcoming and non-threatening. Thus, perhaps the availability of TCs as another option for services may help address the existing disparity between the high distress rates and low service utilization rates among Alaska Native Peoples. It should be emphasized, however, that the current study found no evidence to support that TCs improved college adjustment from Time 1 to Time 2. Although the availability of TCs as a service alternative may address the disparity regarding the high rates of psychological distress and low rates of mental health service utilization among Alaska Natives, this study found no evidence to suggest that TCs will be effective in actually addressing psychological distress better than MSGs among Alaska Native students.

Study Limitations

The current study had several limitations and thus, its findings should be interpreted cautiously. The first, and perhaps the most significant, limitation of the current study is the lack of a control group. The presented study did not include a no-treatment control condition. Instead, this study compared one form of support group (TC) to another (MSG). If a no-treatment control condition was included, and if participants in this condition had a significant decrease in their SACQ and commitment to college scores, then the possible effectiveness and benefits of TCs and MSGs could have been demonstrated. Future studies investigating the effectiveness of TCs should seriously consider having a no-treatment control condition.

Second, although recruiting Alaska Native individuals for research participation is already difficult in general, the recruitment of Alaska Native student participants for this study was further limited and became more of a challenge because recruitment activities inside the premises of UAA's Native Student Services (NSS) – the largest organization of Alaska Native students on campus – was not conducted. Participant recruitment through NSS was not conducted to respect and honor the request of the NSS's director to limit access of Native students to research projects. This led to a small sample size for the study. Future studies with a larger and more representative sample of Alaska Native college students are definitely needed. Third, the current study's findings cannot be generalized to all Alaska Native students and all Alaska Native Peoples. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, there are very significant and meaningful differences among Alaska Native Peoples. Again, future studies involving samples that

are more representative of the diversity of Alaska Native Peoples are needed. Fourth, a major limitation of this study was the decision to condense the original format and number of the chosen mainstream student support group (i.e., the SSCC) sessions from the recommended seven sessions to three sessions, with the rationale being to maintain a consistent number of sessions for the two group comparisons. This may have compromised the integrity of the SSCC and, thus, may have influenced its effectiveness in facilitating adjustment to college life and commitment to college. Fifth, the primary investigator and the co-facilitator were inexperienced with conducting the SSCC, which may have further affected its effectiveness. Sixth, as mentioned above, the primary investigator and the co-facilitator who conducted all the TC and MSG sessions are both Alaska Native and are both trained extensively with culturally-sensitive implementation of psychological services; and this may have potentially influenced the pre and post-test results that contributed to the lack of statistically significant findings between the groups. Seventh, the manner in which the dependent variables were measured is also limited. The SACQ, for instance, is limited in that the questionnaire is transparent which makes it susceptible and vulnerable to various response biases, which is common limitation of psychological research that relies on self-report. Eighth, the current study also attempted to gather information about the student participants' class attendance, academic standing (such as grades), number of credits being taken, and overall GPA; yet such data were difficult to draw comparisons pre and post-test because of the confusions among the participants in terms of how to complete them. Thus, such measures of participants' academic performance were deemed unreliable and difficult to interpret. Future studies

using better and more precise measures, perhaps even measures that are less affected by culture and typical limitations of self-report (e.g., teacher ratings, observer reports, etc.) may be conducted to better assess the benefits of TCs in facilitating adjustment to college life and academic performance. Ninth, related to the limitations of the measures, future studies should consider using a more formal and systematic qualitative data collection and analysis. It is possible that the effectiveness of TCs may be difficult to capture using quantitative measures, especially those that were not developed specifically for use with Alaska Native individuals. Furthermore, the limited qualitative information collected by the current study seem to have captured something about the benefits of TCs that the quantitative measures did not, suggesting that the use of mixed quantitative-qualitative methodologies may yield more accurate results. Tenth, long periods of time between sessions and the low number of total sessions during the semester were also apparent limitations of this study. Student participants occasionally verbalized that they wished groups met more often. In addition, some students appeared to be struggling both personally and academically to the point that they could have benefited from some type of support perhaps on a weekly basis rather than waiting weeks in between each session. These factors should be seriously considered when implementing such support groups in the future. Finally, another limitation of this study pertains to the type of students who committed to participating and completing the project. Such students seem to be “high functioning,” as indicated by their committed attendance to the project with some even taking taxi cabs or walking significant distances just to attend the sessions. Such a commitment is further displayed by the students’ high quality of participation and

contribution during the group process and the students exhibiting eagerness to learn how to succeed in college. This may be even be especially true for the participants in the TC group, as they exhibited noticeably higher scores than MSG participants at Time 1 on most of the SACQ scales, suggesting that the TC participants may have already been well-adjusted to college life and are highly motivated college students. It is possible that if the participants were struggling to begin with, then the SSCC and TCs may have produced some statistically significant positive changes, and perhaps even some statistically significant differences between them. Future research with Alaska Native students who may not be as well-adjusted and motivated as the current sample, or perhaps those who may be struggling, are needed to further explore the potential benefits of the TCs with this population.

Conclusion

Despite the aforementioned limitations and the lack of support for most of the study's hypotheses, this dissertation still contributes to the scientific community's understanding of an indigenous healing practice – the TC. The presented study is the first known empirical investigation of the effectiveness of TCs among Alaska Native individuals. Furthermore, the current study employed a true experimental design, demonstrating that psychological research with Alaska Natives can be conducted in a scientifically rigorous, yet still culturally sensitive and respectful manner. Thus, the current study may serve to inspire future research, with improved methods, which seek to document the effectiveness and benefits of TCs in an empirical manner. Moreover, the

findings also suggest that TCs may be more satisfying for Alaska Native college students than even other culturally sensitive student support groups developed for ethnic and cultural minority students. Such results may contribute to our understanding of providing less threatening and more welcoming ways with which to serve Alaska Native individuals, which may be useful in addressing the low rates of mental health help-seeking among this population. With further similar research, perhaps indigenous practices such as TCs will eventually be found as valid, legitimate, and effective as Western forms of healing; and perhaps indigenous practices will eventually also receive the same level of respect, attention, recognition, funding, and support as their Western counterparts.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that the effectiveness of TCs was investigated using Western methods and measures. In other words, Western methods and criteria were used to determine if TCs are effective and beneficial. It is possible that the methods and standards used in this dissertation may not have been the best and most fair manner of evaluating TCs. As Tribal Doctor Rita Blumenstein stated when she was informed that I was going to conduct this study in this manner, “That’s exciting. Go for it! But you won’t find anything.” Nevertheless, she went on to express her complete belief in the effectiveness and benefits of TCs, stating, “The Talking Circle is what is going to heal our people.” Contrary to the study’s central hypothesis, and consistent with Dr. Blumenstein’s statement, this dissertation found no evidence to support the effectiveness of TCs in facilitating adjustment to college life, academic performance, and commitment to completing college among a sample of Alaska Native students. Nonetheless, we need

to keep looking for that evidence, even if it means going beyond the conventional boundaries of Western epistemology.

References

- Adams, D. W. (1995). *Education for extinction: American Indians and the boarding school experience*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Health Planning and Systems Development (with the McDowell Group). (2007). *Alaska health care data book: Selected measurements 2007*. Retrieved from <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/HealthPlanning/Pages/publications/healthcare/default.aspx>
- American College Health Association (2009). American College Health Association–National College Health Assessment spring 2008 reference group data report (abridged). *Journal of American College Health*, 57, 477–488. doi:10.3200/JACH.57.5.477-488
- American Psychological Association. (2011). American Psychological Association ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct. *American Psychologist*, 57, 1060-1073. doi:10.1037/0003-066X57.12.1060.
- Baker, R. W., McNeil, O. V., and Siryk, B. (1985). Expectations and reality in freshman adjustment to college. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 32, 94-103. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.32.1.94
- Baker, R. W., & Siryk, B. (1984). Measuring adjustment to college. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 31, 179-189. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.31.1.179
- Baker, R. W., & Siryk, B. (1999). *Student adaptation to college questionnaire (SACQ): Manual*. Los Angeles, CA: Western Psychological Services.
- Beals, J., Novins, D. K., Whitesell, N. R., Spicer, P., & Mitchell, C. M., & Manson, S. M. (2005). Prevalence of mental disorders and utilization of mental health services in two American Indian reservation populations: Mental health disparities in a national context. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 162, 1723-1732. doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.162.9.1723

- Billow, R. M. (2005). The two faces of the group therapist. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 55, 167-187. doi:10.5121/ijgp.55.2.167.62190
- Bolger, M. A. (1997). An exploration of college student stress. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A. Humanities and Social Sciences*, 58(5-A), 1597.
- Boraas, A. S. (1991). Peter Kalifornsky: A biography. In J. Kari & A. S. Boraas (Eds.), *A Dena'ina Legacy - K'tl'egh'i Sukdu: The collected writings of Peter Kalifornsky* (pp. 470-481). Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
- Brave Heart, M. Y. H., & DeBruyn, L. M. (1998). The American Indian holocaust: Healing historical unresolved grief. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research: Journal of the National Center*, 8(2), 56-78.
- Buckley, H. D. (1971). A comparison of freshman and transfer expectations. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 12(3), 186-188.
- Center for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health. (2009). 2009 *Pilot study: Executive summary*. Retrieved from Pennsylvania State University website: <http://ccmh.squarespace.com/storage/2009-CSCMH-Pilot-Report.pdf>
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Clarkson, L., Morrisette, V., & Régallet, G. (1992). *Our responsibility to the Seventh Generation: Indigenous Peoples and sustainable development*. Retrieved from International Institute for Sustainable Development website: http://www.iisd.org/pdf/seventh_gen.pdf
- Coates, R. B., Umbreit, M. S., & Vos, B. (2000). *Executive summary: Restorative justice circles in South Saint Paul, Minnesota*. Retrieved from University of Minnesota, Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking website: http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/rjp/resources/Research/Ex_Sum%20_S_St._Paul_Circles.pdf

- Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, 155-159. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.112.1.155
- Cole, D. L. (2009). Staying within the margins: The educational stories of first generation, low-income college students. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A. Humanities and Social Sciences*, 70(2A), 689.
- Department of Justice Canada, Youth Justice Research. (2004). *A one-day snapshot of Aboriginal youth in custody across Canada: Phase II*. Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2004/yj2-jj2/yj2.pdf>
- Donato, D. J. (1973). Junior college transfers and a university environment. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 14(3), 254-259.
- Duran, E. (2006). *Healing the soul wound: Counseling with American Indians and other Native peoples*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Duran, E., & Duran, B. (1995). *Native American postcolonial psychology*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Eason, E. A. (2009). Diversity and group theory, practice, and research. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 59, 563-574. doi:10.1521/ijgp.2009.59.4.563
- Eller, M. (2005, June-August). Healing ancient wounds: Tradition & transition. *Shift: At the Frontiers of Consciousness*, 7, 32-35.
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A.-G., & Buchner, A. (2007). G* Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences. *Behavior Research Methods*, 39, 175. doi:10.3758/BF03193146
- Fitch, T. & Marshall, J. L. (Eds.). (2011). *Group work and outreach plans for college counselors*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

- Fuchs, E., & Havighurst, R. J. (1972). *To live on this earth: American Indian education*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Gallagher, R.P. (2011). *National survey of counseling center directors 2011*. Retrieved from American College Counseling Association website: <http://collegecounseling.org/wp-content/uploads/2011-NSCCD.pdf>
- Garrett, M. T., Garrett, J. T., & Brotherton, D. (2001). Inner circle/outer circle: A group technique based on Native American healing circles. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 26, 17-30. doi:10.1080/01933920108413775
- Gilliland, H. (1986). The need for an adapted curriculum. In J. Reyhner (Ed.), *Teaching the Indian child* (1st ed., pp.1-11). Billings, MT: Eastern Montana College.
- Gone, J. P., & Alcántara, C. (2007). Identifying effective mental health interventions for American Indians and Alaska Natives: A review of the literature. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 13, 356-363. doi:10.1037/1099-9809.13.4.356
- Grohs, T. (1998, Fall). Sentencing circle: A general overview and guidelines. *Justice as healing: A newsletter on Aboriginal concepts of justice*, 3(3). Retrieved from http://www.usask.ca/nativelaw/publications/jah/1998/Sent_Circle_Guidelines.pdf
- Hagan, K., & Provost, E. (2009). *Alaska Native health status report*. Retrieved from Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, Alaska Native Epidemiology Center website: <http://www.anthc.org/chs/epicenter/upload/ANHSR.pdf>
- Hart, M. (1997). *An ethnographic study of healing circles as a culturally appropriate practice approach with Aboriginal people* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB.
- Heilbron, C. L., & Guttman, M. A. J. (2000). Traditional healing methods with First Nations women in group counseling. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 34(1), 3-13.

- Heinrich, R. K., Corbine, J. L., & Thomas, K. R. (1990). Counseling Native Americans. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 69*, 128-139.
doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.1990.tb01473.x
- Hicks, T. & Heastie, S. (2008). High school to college transition: A profile of the stressors, physical and psychological health issues that affect the first-year on-campus college student. *Journal of Cultural Diversity, 15*(3), 143-147.
- Hodge, F. S., Fredericks, L. & Rodriguez, B. (1996). American Indian women's talking circle. A cervical cancer screening and prevention project. *American Cancer Society, 78*, 1592-1597.
doi:10.1002/(SICI)1097-0142(19961001)78:7<1592::AID-CNCR39>3.3.CO;2-T
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (1996). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Retrieved from http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071115053257/http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sgmm_e.html
- La Belle, J., Smith, S. L., Easley, C., & Charles, G. P. (2005). *Boarding school: Historical trauma among Alaska's Native People*. Retrieved from University of Alaska Anchorage, National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Elders website:
http://elders.uaa.alaska.edu/reports/yr2_2boarding-school.pdf
- LaFromboise, T. D., Trimble, J. E., & Mohatt, G. V. (1990). Counseling intervention and American Indian tradition: An integrative approach. *Counseling Psychologist, 18*, 628-654. doi:10.1177/0011000090184006
- Lambert, C. (2008, March-April). Trails of tears, and hope. *Harvard Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://harvardmagazine.com/2008/03/trails-of-tears-and-hope?page=all>
- Marbella, A. M., Harris, M. C., Diehr, S., Ignace, G., & Ignace, G. (1998). Use of Native American healers among Native American patients in an urban Native American health center. *Archives of Family Medicine, 7*(2), 182-185.

- Martin, S., & Hill, A. (2009). *The changing economic status of Alaska Natives, 1970-2007* (Note No. 5). Retrieved from University of Alaska Anchorage, Institute of Social and Economic Research website:
<http://www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu/Publications/webnote/WebNote5.pdf>
- McCormick, R. M. (1997). First Nations counselor training in British Columbia: Strengthening the circle. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health, 16*(2), 91-99.
- McCormick, R. M., Neumann, H., Amundson, N. E., & McLean, H. B. (1999). First Nations career/life planning model: Guidelines for practitioners. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 36*, 167-267. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1920.1999.tb01019.x
- Miller, J. R. (1996). *Shingwauk's vision: A history of Native residential schools*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Moore, P. A. (2003). *Alaska Native and American Indian Students at UAA* (Topic Paper 2003-04). Retrieved from University of Alaska Anchorage, Office of Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment website:
<http://opra.uaa.alaska.edu/Specialrep/Alaska%20Native%20and%20American%20Indian%20for%20WEB.pdf>
- Morgan, R., & Freeman, L. (2009). The healing of our people: Substance abuse and historical trauma. *Substance Use & Misuse, 44*, 84-98.
 doi:10.1080/10826080802525678
- Nabigon, H., Hagey, R., Webster, S., & MacKay, R. (1998). The learning circle as a research method: The trickster and windigo in research. *Native Social Work Journal, 2*(1), 113-137.
- Napoleon, H. (1996). *Yunyaraq: The way of the human being*. Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

- National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse. (2007). *Wasting the best and the brightest: Substance abuse at America's colleges and universities*. Retrieved from Columbia University website:
http://www.casacolumbia.org/templates/publications_reports.aspx?keywords=college
- Nolen-Hoeksema, S., & Morrow, J. (1991). A prospective study of depression and posttraumatic stress symptoms after a natural disaster: The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 115-121.
 doi:10.1037/0022-3514.61.1.115
- Novins, D. K., Beals, J., Moore, L. A., Spicer, P., Manson, S. M. & AI-SUPERPFP Team. (2004). Use of biomedical services and traditional healing options among American Indians: Sociodemographic correlates, spirituality, and ethnic identity. *Medical Care*, 42, 670-679. doi:10.1097/01.mlr.0000129902.29132.a6
- Oleksa, M. (2005). *Another culture/another world*. Juneau, AK: Association of Alaska School Boards.
- Reyhner, J. (1992). Plans for dropout prevention and special school support services for American Indian and Alaska Native students. *Indian Nations at Risk Task Force Commissioned Papers*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
 Retrieved from: <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/INAR.html>
- Rieger, L. (2001). Circle peacemaking. *Alaska Justice Forum*, 17(4), 6-7.
- Roberts, J. V., & Stalans, L. J. (2004). Restorative sentencing: Exploring views of the public. *Social Justice Research*, 17, 315-334.
 doi:10.1023/B:SORE.0000041296.99271.52
- Roderick, L. (Ed.). (2008). *Do Alaska Native people get free medical care?: And other frequently asked questions about Alaska Native issues and cultures*. Anchorage, AK: University of Alaska Anchorage and Alaska Pacific University.

- Schultz, B.R. (2008). *A descriptive study of freshman adjustment to college at the University of Alaska* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession No. 2009-99090-308).
- Spengler, T. (2010). *Suicide rates, prevention funding, and prevention efforts in Alaska* (Legislative Research Report 11.015). Retrieved from Alaska Legislature, Legislative Research Services
website: <http://archives2.legis.state.ak.us/PublicImageServer.cgi?1ra/2011/11-015m.pdf>
- Statewide Suicide Prevention Council. (2010). *Alaska suicide facts and statistics: Suicide statistics for Alaska statewide suicide prevention council*. Retrieved from http://dhss.alaska.gov/SuicidePrevention/Documents/pdfs_sspc/AKSuicideStatistics.pdf
- Steen, S. (2011). Academic and personal development through group work: An exploratory study. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 36, 129-143. doi:10.1080/01933922.2011.562747
- Steen, S., & Bemak, F. (2008). Group work with high school students at risk of school failure: A pilot study. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 33, 335-350. doi:10.1080/01933920802404144
- Steen, S., Griffin, D., & Shi, Q. (2011). *Supporting students of color on campus*. In T. Fitch & J. Marshall (Eds.), *Group work and outreach plans for college counselors* (pp. 111-121). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *Results from the 2010 national survey on drug use and health: Mental health findings* (NSDUH Series H-42, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 11-4667). Retrieved from http://www.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUH/2k10MH_Findings/2k10MHResults.pdf
- Sue, S. (1998). In search of cultural competence in psychotherapy and counseling. *American Psychologist*, 53, 440-448. doi:10.1037/0003-066x.53.4.440

- Sue, S., Fujino, D. C., Hu, L.-T., Takeuchi, D. T., & Zane, N. W. S. (1991). Community mental health services for ethnic minority groups: A test of the cultural responsiveness hypothesis. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 59*, 533-540. doi:10.1037/0022-006x.59.4.533
- Sullivan, A., & Brems, C. (1997). The psychological repercussions of the sociocultural oppression of Alaska Native Peoples. *Genetic, Social, & General Psychology Monographs, 123*(4), 411-440.
- Thomas, W., & Bellefeuille, G. (2006). An evidence-based formative evaluation of a cross cultural Aboriginal mental health program in Canada. *Advances in Mental Health 5*, 202-215. doi:10.5172/jamh.5.3.202
- Torrey, B. B. (1980). *Slaves of the harvest*. St. Paul Island, AK: Tanadgusix Corporation.
- Trapnell, P. D., & Campbell, J. D. (1999). Rumination-reflection questionnaire. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 76*, 284-304. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.76.2.284
- Trimble, J. E., & Fleming, C. M. (1989). Providing counseling services for Native American Indians: Client, counselor, and community characteristics. In P. B. Pedersen, W. J. Lonner, J. G. Dragnus, & J. E. Trimble (Eds.), *Counseling across cultures* (pp. 145-167). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- University of Alaska Anchorage, Office of Institutional Effectiveness in partnership with Office of Institutional Research and Office of Budget and Finance. (2008). *2008 Performance Report*. Retrieved from http://www.alaska.edu/swbir/performance/assessment/UAA_Performance_review08.pdf
- University of Alaska Anchorage, Office of Institutional Effectiveness in partnership with Office of Institutional Research and Office of Budget and Finance. (2009). *2009 Performance Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/institutionaleffectiveness/upload/Performance-09-final.pdf>

- University of Alaska Anchorage, Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and Academic Support in partnership with Office of Institutional Research and Office of Budget and Finance. (2012). *2012 Performance Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/institutionaleffectiveness/upload/performance-12-for-web.pdf>
- Urbaniak, G.C. & Plous, S. (1997-2011). Research Randomizer. Retrieved from <http://www.randomizer.org/>
- Walls, M. L., Johnson, K. D., Whitbeck, L. B., & Hoyt, D. R. (2006). Mental health and substance abuse services preferences among American Indian people of the Northern Midwest. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 42, 521-535. doi:10.1007/s10597-006-9054-7
- Walters, K. (2009, October 6). Student retention rates lower for Native Students. *The Northern Light: University of Alaska Student Newspaper*. Retrieved from <http://www.thenorthernlight.org/2009/10/06/student-retention-rates-lower-for-native-students/>
- Woods, T. (2010). [Interviews with Alaska Native Elders, leaders and cultural bearers regarding the history, process and utility of talking circles among Alaska Native populations]. Unpublished raw data.
- Yalom, I. D. (2005). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Appendix A

Adjustment to College Life Participant Consent Form

The Effectiveness of Student Support Groups to Assist Alaska Native Students'
Adjustment to College Life
University of Alaska Anchorage
Doctoral Dissertation
Consent for Research

Tina Woods, M.S., Principal Investigator
E.J.R. David, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Research Supervisor
Jordan Skan, Group Co-Facilitator
Department of Psychology
IRB # 328784-2 Approved: 5-16-2012

My name is Tina Woods. I am a doctoral student in the University of Alaska Anchorage and the University Alaska Fairbanks, Clinical-Community Psychology Ph.D. program with a Rural Indigenous Emphasis. I am asking you to participate in a research project that I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. In this consent form I will describe the reason for this study, what your responsibility will be as a participant, and the possible risks and benefits you may experience. If you sign this form, it means that I have explained the study to you and that you agree to be a part of it.

Purpose: I am asking you to participate in one of two group activities aimed at improving Alaska Native students' adjustment to college life. If you agree to participate, you will be assigned randomly to one of two types of group activities. Both of the group activities have been used previously to help students adjust to college life or other life events. I would like to understand the value of different types of student support groups as a method for assisting Alaska Native students at UAA with adjustment to college life.

Procedure: Participation in this study involves: (1) attending and participating in three student support group sessions over the course of the semester, each lasting approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours, and (2) completing a 20-30 minute questionnaire at the first and last group session. The questionnaire will ask you to share your approximate scores for each class in your schedule, your class attendance, and study time for each class. It will also ask you to respond to questions about your adjustment to college life in four areas: a) academic; b) social; c) personal-emotional; and d) institutional attachment. You will respond to these questions by using the Student Adaptation to College

Questionnaire (SACQ) form. At the end of the study, you will be asked to indicate how culturally sensitive you felt the group was. During the group sessions, we will discuss the kinds of things that might be impacting your adjustment to college life. This might include homesickness, depression, stress, test-anxiety and disconnect between your culture and the University system. Topics that may be discussed in group will include exploring ways to be successful in college, strategies for dealing with common issues among students, promoting self-advocacy, building relationships, and identifying personal strengths and goals. I will run all of the groups and I will have a co-facilitator present to help me with the groups. His name is Jordan Skan and he is also a doctoral student in Psychology.

Confidentiality: All information from this study will be kept private and your name will not be identified in any reports or publications. None of the sessions will be recorded. I will only ask for your sex, age, number of credit hours you have finished in college, tribe, and place of residence. Your questionnaire responses will be stored in a locked cabinet only accessible by me. Names and communities will not be shared without permission. The group will be instructed that information that is shared within the group is to be kept private. The one exception to your confidentiality in this study would be if you report any knowledge about assault or abuse to minors, elders, or disabled persons because I am a mandated reporter.

Mandated Reporting Requirements: I am a mandated reporter and I am required to report to authorities if anyone suggests that they are aware of abuse of minors, elders, or other vulnerable populations. Qualified reports under these circumstances may include harm from abandonment, abuse, exploitation, neglect, or self-neglect. Reports will be made to the appropriate organizations including the Office of Children Services or Adult Protective Services.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: You can stop your participation in the group at any time and this will not affect your status as a student at UAA. You may also choose not to answer any of the items on the questionnaires.

Benefits: We expect that good information will come out of this study. This study is aimed at exploring positive ways to work with Alaska Native students to help with the issue of retaining students at UAA until they complete their degree. You personally may benefit from your experience in the group, although this cannot be guaranteed.

Risks or Adverse Effects: It is possible that you may feel some uneasiness or emotional discomfort as you talk about topics and issues impacting you, your family, and your community. You will be informed about emotions that can develop. You will also be

informed about the time commitment of the group process. You will be given time to debrief with a mental health provider if needed. I am also attaching a list of the resources available on campus should you feel the need to see a mental health provider at any point in time during or after this study.

Thank you gifts: If you decide to participate, you will be eligible to receive a \$15 Subway gift card during the first and second group sessions and a \$20 Starbucks gift card after your participation in the third and final group. You will also qualify to enter a drawing for a \$200 gift card upon completing all three groups during the semester.

Contacts: If you have questions or concerns about this study, you can contact me, Tina Woods, at (907) 301-5619 or tmwoods2@uaa.alaska.edu. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr. E.J.R David at 907-786-6778 or ejrdavid@uaa.alaska.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the UAA Compliance Officer at 786-1099.

Authorization: By signing this form, it means that you are over the age of 18 and you have read and understand the risks and benefits of contributing to this study. Your participation is completely your choice. You may end your participation at any time without concerns. You are free to ask questions about this study at any time.

Name (print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Mental Health Resources on UAA Campus

	Student Health and Counseling Center	Psychological Services Center	Student Development Counseling Support Services
Location	Rasmuson Hall, Room 116 and Room 120	Social Sciences Building Room 225	Student Union, Room 204
Phone	907-786-4040	907-786-1795	907-786-6158
Web	www.uaa.alaska.edu/studenthealth	www.uaa.alaska.edu/psych/services	www.uaa.alaska.edu/deanofstudents
Fall & Spring Hours	Monday-Thursday 8am to 7pm, Friday 8am to 5pm	Monday-Thursday 8am to 8pm, Friday 8am to 5pm	By appointment
Summer Hours	Monday-Friday 8am to 5pm	Please call for hours	By appointment

Note: The Student Health and Counseling Center is free to UAA students who are registered for six or more credits. The Psychological Services Center has a sliding fee scale to accommodate individual's needs.

Appendix B

Adjustment to College Life Research Debriefing Form

The Effectiveness of Student Support Groups to Assist Alaska Native Students'
Adjustment to College Life

Debriefing Form

This form will give you some background information about the study you have just participated in. Please do not share this form with others until the end of the semester, as they may still be involved in other parts of the study.

- Alaska Native students at the University of Alaska Anchorage have significantly lower retention rates in comparison to the overall student body.
- This study was designed to evaluate the value and success of two types of student support groups used with Alaska Native students at UAA to assist with adjustment to college life.
- This study was designed to compare the effectiveness of Talking Circles to Mainstream Student Support Groups in facilitating adjustment to college life and academic performance among Alaska Native students at UAA.
- The study wants to recognize how traditional indigenous circles can be useful for increasing the retention of Alaska Native students at UAA while completing their college education.
- The study intends to determine whether Talking Circles are just as effective, if not more effective, than other types of college support groups in facilitating adjustment to college life and academic performance among Alaska Native college students.

To read more about Talking Circles and their utility you may review the following resources:

- Napoleon, H. (1996). *Yuuyaraq: The way of the human being*. Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network.
- <http://www.muiniskw.org/pgCulture2c.htm>
- <http://talkingcircle.net/>

- Your name and all identifying information will not be linked to your responses.
 - I will only report results of this study through the use of group data.
 - Your identity will be protected when oral presentations or written reports about this study are shared with the general public.
- We are thankful for your participation in this study. Please contact Tina Woods, at (907) 301-5619 or by email at tmwoods2@uaa.alaska.edu if you have further questions.
- You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. E.J.R. David at 907-786-6778 or email ejrdavid@uaa.alaska.edu if you have any questions or concerns.
- If you have questions or concerns as a research participant, please contact the UAA Compliance Officer at (907) 786-1099.

Thank you for your time.

Mental Health Resources on UAA Campus

	Student Health and Counseling Center	Psychological Services Center	Student Development Counseling Support Services
Location	Rasmuson Hall, Room 116 and Room 120	Social Sciences Building Room 225	Student Union, Room 204
Phone	907-786-4040	907-786-1795	907-786-6158
Web	www.uaa.alaska.edu/studenthealth	www.uaa.alaska.edu/psych/services	www.uaa.alaska.edu/deanofstudents
Fall & Spring Hours	Monday-Thursday 8am to 7pm, Friday 8am to 5pm	Monday-Thursday 8am to 8pm, Friday 8am to 5pm	By appointment
Summer Hours	Monday-Friday 8am to 5pm	Please call for hours	By appointment

Note: The Student Health and Counseling Center is free to UAA students who are registered for six or more credits. The Psychological Services Center has a sliding fee scale to accommodate individual's needs.

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Adjustment to College Life Study: Demographic Questionnaire

(Please fill in the blanks or put a check next to your answer in the space provided)

1. What is your sex?
2. How old are you?
3. What Alaska Native tribe do you identify with most?
 - ☐ Aleut
 - ☐ Athabascan
 - ☐ Eyak
 - ☐ Eskimo (Yup'ik, Cup'ik, Siberian Yupik, Sugpiaq/Alutiq, Inupiaq)
 - ☐ Haida
 - ☐ Tlingit
 - ☐ Tsimshian
4. When talking to people at UAA, what town, village or city do you say you come from?
5. Where do you currently live?

How long have you lived there? years months



Appendix D

Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)

Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)

Robert W. Baker, Ph.D. and Bohdan Siryk, M.A.

Published by
WESTERN PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES
wps.
 12031 Wilshire Boulevard
 Los Angeles, CA 90025-1251
 Publishers and Distributors

Directions

Please provide the identifying information requested on the right.

The 67 statements on the front and back of this form describe college experiences. Read each one and decide how well it applies to you at the present time (within the past few days). For each statement, circle the asterisk at the point in the continuum that best represents how closely the statement applies to you. Circle only one asterisk for each statement. To change an answer, draw an X through the incorrect response and circle the desired response. Be sure to use a hard-tipped pen or pencil and press very firmly. Do not erase.

Name: Bill Sample Date: 4-13-87

ID Number: 013-72-6753 Sex: ☐ F ☒ M Date of Birth: 6-18-68

Current Academic Standing: ☒ Freshman ☐ Sophomore ☐ Junior ☐ Senior

Semester: ☐ 1 ☒ 2 ☐ Summer or Quarter: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ Summer

Ethnic Background (optional): ☐ Asian ☐ Black ☐ Hispanic
☐ Native American ☒ White ☐ Other

In the example on the right, Item A applied very closely, and Item B was changed from "doesn't apply at all" to "applies somewhat."

Example										
A.	(*)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
B.	*	*	*	(*)	*	*	*	*	*	(X)

Applies Very Closely to Me Doesn't Apply to Me at All

1. I feel that I fit in well as part of the college environment.
2. I have been feeling tense or nervous lately.
3. I have been keeping up to date on my academic work.
4. I am meeting as many people, and making as many friends as I would like at college.
5. I know why I'm in college and what I want out of it.

(*)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
*	*	*	(*)	*	*	*	*	*	*	(X)

Note: Western Psychological Services (WPS) copyrighted the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) in 1989 and 1999. WPS issued the researcher a limited use license to create a Web based SACQ administration for this study. According to the terms of the limited use license, no more than five SACQ items may be reproduced in print.

Appendix E

Pre-test Open-ended Questionnaire “Adjustment to College Life” RESEARCH

Adjustment to College Life Study: Pre-test Questionnaire

(Circle the number below each question that best describes your answer)

1. Please rate your expectations that participating in a group on college life adjustment will be helpful.

(1= IT **WILL NOT** BE HELPFUL) to (9= IT **WILL BE** EXTREMELY HELPFUL)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

2. Please rate how important it is to you for services to be culturally sensitive to Alaska Native cultural traditions and values.

(1= **NOT** IMPORTANT AT ALL) to (9= EXTREMELY **IMPORTANT**)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

3. Please rate your level of commitment to completing your college education and remaining in college

(1= **NOT** COMMITTED AT ALL) to (9= EXTREMELY **COMMITTED**)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Do you have experience with participating in talking circles or college student support groups? If, yes, please elaborate.

Appendix F

Post-test Open-ended Questionnaire “Adjustment to College Life” RESEARCH

Adjustment to College Life Study: Post-test Questionnaire

(Circle the number below each question that best describes your answer)

1. How satisfied were you with your college life adjustment group?

(1= I was **NOT** at all satisfied) to (9= I **WAS** extremely satisfied)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

In your own words, please explain your satisfaction rating above:

2. How helpful was your college life adjustment group?

(1= It was **NOT** at all helpful) to (9= It **WAS** extremely helpful)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

In your own words, please explain your satisfaction rating above:

3. How culturally sensitive to your Alaska Native cultural traditions and values was your college life adjustment group?

(1= **NOT** Sensitive) to (9= Extremely **SENSITIVE**)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

4. How much did you feel you were heard during your college life adjustment group?

(1= **NOT** heard) to (9= **WELL** heard)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Adjustment to College Life Study: Post-test Questionnaire

(Circle the number below each question that best describes your answer)

5. How much did you feel your culture was understood during your college life adjustment group?

(1= **NOT** understood) to (9= **WELL** understood)

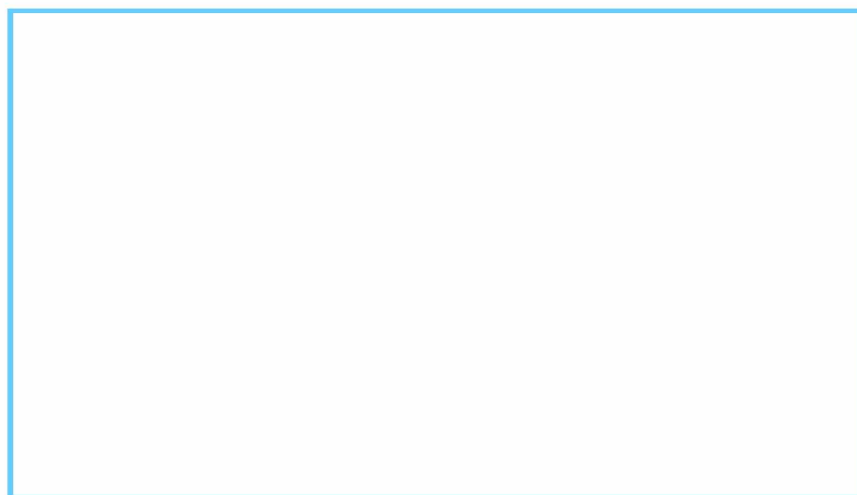
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

6. How committed to completing your college education and remaining in college do you feel since participating in your college life adjustment group?

(1= **NOT COMMITTED** at all) to (9= Extremely **COMMITTED**)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

7. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience participating in this group?



Appendix G

Adjustment to College Life Study: Student Performance Survey “Adjustment to College Life” RESEARCH

Adjustment to College Life Study: Student Performance Survey

(Please fill in the following table with current courses this semester)

Course Number	Course Name	Have you received scores on your assignments in this class yet?	If you have received scores, What is your approximate score so far?	Approximately, what percent of the lectures have you missed so far?	How many hours per week do you typically devote to studying for this class?	How much of the reading that you were supposed to do have you done?	Of the assignments that have been due so far, what percent have you submitted?
Ex: PSY 111	Ex: General Psychology	Check either Yes or No	Ex: 78%	Ex: 3 lectures	Ex: 3 hours	Ex: 85%	Ex: 85%
<input type="text"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> hrs	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/> %
<input type="text"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> hrs	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/> %
<input type="text"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> hrs	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/> %
<input type="text"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> hrs	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/> %
<input type="text"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> hrs	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/> %
<input type="text"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> hrs	<input type="text"/> %	<input type="text"/> %

- How many college credits have you completed at UAA? Credits
- What is your GPA at UAA? (leave blank if you do not yet have a GPA) GPA=
- How many college credits have you completed elsewhere? Credits
- If you have completed college credits elsewhere, what was your GPA outside of UAA? GPA=



Appendix H

Responses to the Open-Ended Questions

Do you have experience with participating in talking circles or college student support groups? If yes, please elaborate.	
MSG Participant Responses	TC Participant Responses
Yes, there were a lot of times in the Camai Room that had talking circles and that's one thing that drew my attention toward UAA.	RRANN has been a support type of group for me. we have monthly meetings and talk about nursing school and the future of the field.
Yes, healing circles.	Yes, youth group at church at my home though.
I have participated in focus groups about student success. I helped conduct the focus groups.	Yes, but I did back in 2009-2011 in a student club.
None yet but would love to meet with natives often. Very isolated from community.	No.
No, not a lot.	Somewhat.
Some talking circle experience in the work place. Very limited experience.	No.
Only since this summer. I attended the AAIP (Association of Indian Physician) conference and met other native students they held women's talking circles and a couple students ones during the week, but no prior experience. I've been a working student until this semester and haven't done much for students prior to this school year.	No.
One of my AK Native Scholarships required us to be a part of mentoring. These groups were only required for one year. All students were required and they were all going to different schools.	
I've been to Providence Breakthrough treatment program.	
No.	

In your own words, please explain your satisfaction of the group?	
MSG Participant Responses	TC Participant Responses
<p>At first I was shy and nervous. Now, I know almost the whole campus and I love it.</p> <p>I was very satisfied, felt more confident to myself for my classes I am attending.</p> <p>It was good, good to get together.</p> <p>I found what we talked about very informative. Only reason I gave it a 7 was because I missed the second group, which I suspect where most of the interaction took place.</p> <p>I am very satisfied because I have learned that I am in control of my life from the start of this group through the course of the semester.</p> <p>I missed one of them sadly and I feel bad about it but I'm glad Tina is such a nice lady.</p> <p>I was able to share my personal experiences and hopefully help others.</p> <p>I didn't know what to expect at the start. So I didn't have expectations but was glad to meet more people that feel familiar like understand things implicitly with similar explanation styles.</p> <p>I love it.</p> <p>I felt everyone was confident in answering questions and comfortable with giving sensitive information to the group.</p> <p>It was informative</p> <p>I enjoyed the 1st session emensly and missed the 2nd session. The information given at the group was helpful, even though I did not really need to adjust to college life. I've been in college for roughly 6 years.</p> <p>College life adjustment group allowed me to feel more content with attending college, knowing others felt the same.</p>	<p>I feel relieved that I am not only one with problems in college.</p> <p>I enjoyed coming to this group. It was relieving.</p> <p>I found this to be very beneficial. I liked to have a place to voice my struggles and to share my joys.</p> <p>I talked about my issues that has been going on. None of my family knows about them.</p> <p>It was a safe non-threatening group who respected my deep emotional problems.</p> <p>We all connected very well and learned a lot about ourselves as people and students.</p> <p>I enjoyed the group, I felt comfortable, learned more about people, met a few new people, and got a few tips to help me do better.</p> <p>I feel I learned a lot through sharing and listening with the small group of peers. As each session passed I felt more open and connected with everyone.</p> <p>It was helpful to see people, in all stages of their college career, have hard struggles at some point like I did too. Put me at ease.</p> <p>Very pleased with all the meetings I attended.</p>

How helpful was your college life adjustment group?	
MSG Participant Responses	TC Participant Responses
<p>UAA saved my life when my dad was murdered. I feel it's only fair I return the favor to everyone else.</p> <p>This group opened me up, made more new friends I can hang out, feel more academic and motivated for college.</p> <p>I learned a few new things.</p> <p>Most of what I heard, I have heard before but I found it helpful to hear it again. Hearing things multiple times helps me remember and hopefully apply to my life.</p> <p>I have met a lot of people who are in the same struggles I am in and it gives me hope to get through it and maintain motivation.</p> <p>Both times I went, I felt good and confident.</p> <p>This group format was helpful as a way to see that other students have trouble too and that even after some set-backs, you can still be successful. The resources are potentially helpful will check them out soon.</p> <p>I learned some new studying techniques and was refreshed with some new techniques that I have forgotten about.</p> <p>I learned a few things.</p> <p>It was a great experience, but because I have been in college for what feels like decades, I did not need to adjust to college life.</p> <p>Other's thoughts and helpful tips will allow me to improve my study habits, life style in the future.</p>	<p>Discussing new ways to deal with problems in college was extremely helpful. I do feel like I need one on one help still though.</p> <p>It was good to talk about things that may be you couldn't really talk about elsewhere. It was good to know you're not alone.</p> <p>Very helpful in helping me realize I need to take time out of my busy life and spend some time with my family and make more time for myself.</p> <p>Very.</p> <p>I needed to tell someone the strife I was going through. The group listened sincerely with no criticism or suggestions only compassion, support and sympathy.</p> <p>It gave me the tools I needed to identify my problems as a student and how I should fix them.</p> <p>Life I said above, I got quite a bit out of this group.</p> <p>I gained a lot of insight on different study patterns and also found new ways to help me study for that future classes.</p> <p>People gave me great advice, and tips on how to stay motivated. The praise was nice also.</p> <p>Was helpful to hear other people's experiences and to share my own.</p>

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience participating in this group?

MSG Participant Responses	TC Participant Responses
<p>In this group, I made a promise oath and vow to complete my education. If a degree waited for me on the other side I would happily walk across a bed of nails.</p> <p>Feel more confident for my next semester to begin, I would feel more prepared, to continue my education for my degree.</p> <p>I would have liked to have the students interact more, talk about their experiences and opinions. Although this may have occurred at the second meeting. Other than that, I really enjoyed the group... and food!!! I particularly like listening to other people's experiences.</p> <p>The food, people and discussions were all great. I wish everyone here the best! I am so glad I came here, I got so much from this group that I could not have attained anywhere else. Quyanna!</p> <p>Again, I'm sorry I missed so much of it. If you do something like this again, do let me and my family know. I'd love for natives to get together and help each other out.</p> <p>It was kinda sad to see the group get smaller each time we met. I can understand that this time of year is busy, though the group only met for a couple hours. Thank you for hosting these meetings both for your food and time. I appreciate the chance to make some new connections, especially feeling slightly like someone that doesn't quite fit in very well. Since the first meeting I've taken advantage of some opportunities on campus like baby kuspuk making- before I hadn't tried going for fear of being not right so thanks for that too.</p> <p>I liked it. I enjoyed talking with Tina Woods about my experiences and my life.</p> <p>This adjusting to college group has been extremely beneficial to me. I wish everyone had the opportunity to hear helpful tips to succeed. I'm very lucky to have been able to participate.</p>	<p>I really enjoyed it. It was helpful to talk to others going through the same thing.</p> <p>Thank you! I feel like I have taken away valuable information and I think this type of group would be awesome for other native students at any college.</p> <p>It helped me to speak, I'm very scared to tell my friends and family back at home.</p> <p>Like other things that come upon my life this was almost magically woven into the series of my life enhancing experiences. I felt safe and respected in the atmosphere presented with each group. I was able to be totally open and honest when facing and healing from certain plaguing feelings and emotions. I was able to recognize and acknowledge the reality of my current situation, take a good look at where I was and where I needed to be going and start moving forward with a guiding light.</p> <p>I really enjoyed the group. Thank You.</p> <p>I feel through sharing different experiences of my life with the group I learned a lot about myself, not only academically but also as an individual.</p> <p>I'm glad to meet new people who have or had the same struggles I do. Especially when I felt that thought people seemed very confident and secure. I feel like I've formed a bond and can ask this person my questions and they will answer.</p> <p>This group was fantastic! Groups like this would be very helpful to other college students similar to me in successfully completing college and earning a degree.</p>

Appendix I

Pilot Study: The Talking Circle Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about the Talking Circle used among Alaska Native Peoples?
2. What is the process of facilitating a Talking Circle?
3. Did Alaska Native Peoples use the Talking Circle within their tribes and how did they use it?

Appendix J

Letter of Support- Jay Butler



Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

Division of Community Health Services • 4000 Ambassador Drive, 4th Floor • Anchorage, Alaska 99508 • Phone: (907) 729-3648 • Fax: (907) 729-3652 • www.anthc.org

Greetings,

It is my great pleasure to write this letter in the strongest support of the doctoral dissertation research of Tina Woods. Ms. Woods's work will evaluate the perceived benefits of Talking Circles in addressing historical trauma among Alaska Native peoples. Substance abuse and suicide continue to disproportionately impact Native communities, and Ms Woods's proposed work strikes at the heart of one of the critical root causes of these leading causes of poor health and years of potential life lost. This work will explore what elements of the Talking Circle are beneficial from the perspective of Alaska Native people. Additionally, this work will also determine whether there are tribal or regional differences in how Talking Circles are conducted and in how they are perceived and can help direct the course of behavioral health work in Alaska for decades to come. The Division of Community Health Services will support this work by providing office space for interviews with elders and Circle facilitators. Dr. Rita Blumenstein, who is on staff in our Division, has kindly agreed to provide elder consultation to Ms. Woods on this project.

Personally, I would also like to endorse Ms. Woods's competence as a health researcher. I first met her when I was a study participant in a focus group on banking of biological specimens that was conducted by Southcentral Foundation in 2010. Ms. Woods conducted the focus groups and was remarkably professional, respectful, and personable during the course of the sessions. In mid-2010, we were very fortunate to have Ms. Woods join the staff in the Division of Community Health Services as Deputy Director of the Department of Behavioral Health. She rapidly distinguished herself by her hard work, intelligence, and remarkable interpersonal skills, and she is currently Active Director of the Department of Behavioral Health. My only disappointment is that she is not available to be a candidate for the permanent Director position because of the demands of completing her internship and requirements to finalize the work required to earn her doctoral degree. I look for to Ms. Wood completing her training and I hope that we will be able to attract her back to the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. In my opinion, Ms. Woods embodies the ideal Alaska Native health researcher and leader. Her future is bright and the Alaska Tribal Health System would be wise to invest in her continued development.

Please feel free to contact me if there are questions and if I can provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Jay C. Butler, MD, FAAP, FACP
Senior Director, Division of Community Health Services

Appendix K

Letter of Support- Jim La Belle

March 20, 2012

Tina Marie Woods, Doctoral Candidate
UAA-UAF Joint Clinical Community Psychology Program with a Rural Indigenous Emphasis
3211 Providence Drive, SSB 303
Anchorage, AK 99508

RE: *Letter of Support for Tina M. Woods, UAA Doctoral Candidate in Psychology*

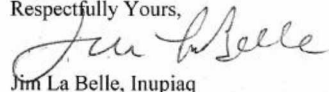
Dear Mrs. Woods,

Please accept this letter of support regarding your dissertation project titled, "*A Comparison between Talking Circles and Mainstream Student Support Groups for Facilitating Adjustment to College Life among Alaska Native Students*" to be conducted at the University of Alaska Anchorage. I am aware that you are a doctoral candidate in the Joint Clinical-Community Psychology program with a Rural Indigenous Emphasis. Furthermore, I am also aware that you are interested in submitting a proposal to the UAA Institutional Review Board for a project focusing specifically on Alaska Native students at UAA.

The therapeutic effectiveness of talking circles used among Alaska Native Peoples remains unexplored through scientific research. However, elders believe that the circle was a common practice of communication among our ancestors. Moreover, scientific and scholarly literature regarding the use of Talking Circles among Alaska Native people is scarce. Therefore, supporting the need for an empirical investigation of the potential benefits of the circle among Alaska Native Peoples is essential. In efforts to condense such a substantial investigation and to create a foundation for future research on the overall effectiveness of talking circles as a whole I recognize that you will focus specifically on adjustment to college life with Alaska Native students.

Our students are the future and it is our responsibility to invest in supporting their success. I believe that your project can be beneficial to Alaska Native students and such research may potentially help students transitioning from rural communities with adjustment to college life. Furthermore, I would like to support your project and application to the Institutional Review Board to include key informant interviews with myself regarding the utility of talking circles used among Alaska Native Peoples.

Respectfully Yours,



Jim La Belle, Inupiaq

Appendix L

Letter of Support- Wilson Justin

February 29, 2012

Tina Marie Woods, Doctoral Candidate
UAA-UAF Joint Clinical Community Psychology Program with a Rural Indigenous Emphasis
3211 Providence Drive, SSB 303
Anchorage, AK 99508

RE: *Letter of Support for Tina M. Woods, UAA Doctoral Candidate in Psychology*

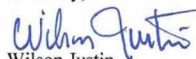
Dear Mrs. Woods,

Please accept this letter of support regarding your dissertation project titled, "*A Comparison between Talking Circles and Mainstream Student Support Groups for Facilitating Adjustment to College Life and Academic Success among Alaska Native Students*" to be conducted at the University of Alaska Anchorage. I am aware that you are a doctoral candidate in the Joint Clinical-Community Psychology program with a Rural Indigenous Emphasis. Furthermore, I am also aware that you are interested in submitting a proposal to the UAA Institutional Review Board for a project focusing specifically on Alaska Native students at UAA.

The therapeutic effectiveness of talking circles used among Alaska Native Peoples remains unexplored through scientific research. However, elders believe that the circle was a common practice of communication among our ancestors. We should note, that the term "Circle" is not used in Athabascan, as it is in its current format English wise. We would say coming together, or "Talks of the Sacred", but Circles as a common term has entered the mainstream so Circles it is. Moreover, scientific and scholarly literature regarding the use of Talking Circles among Alaska Native people is scarce. Therefore, supporting the need for an empirical investigation of the potential benefits of the circle among Alaska Native Peoples is essential. In efforts to condense such a substantial investigation and to create a foundation for future research on the overall effectiveness of talking circles as a whole I recognize that you will focus specifically on adjustment to college life with Alaska Native students.

Our students are the future and it is our responsibility to invest in supporting their success. I believe that your project can be beneficial to Alaska Native students and such research may potentially help students transitioning from rural communities with adjustment to college life. Furthermore, I would like to support your project and application to the Institutional Review Board to include key informant interviews with myself regarding the history and utility of talking circles used among Alaska Native Peoples.

Sincerely,


Wilson Justin,
Athabascan

Appendix M

Letter of Support- Rita Blumenstein



Alaska Native
Tribal Health Consortium

Administration • 4000 Ambassador Drive • Anchorage, Alaska 99508 • Phone: (907) 729-1900 • Fax: (907) 729-1901 • www.anthc.org

February 23, 2012

Tina Marie Woods, Doctoral Candidate
UAA-UAF Joint Clinical Community Psychology Program with a Rural Indigenous
Emphasis
3211 Providence Drive, SSB 303
Anchorage, AK 99508

RE: *Letter of Support for Tina M. Woods, UAA Doctoral Candidate in Psychology*

Dear Mrs. Woods,

Please accept this letter of support regarding your dissertation project titled, "*A Comparison between Talking Circles and Mainstream Student Support Groups for Facilitating Adjustment to College Life among Alaska Native Students*" to be conducted at the University of Alaska Anchorage. I am aware that you are a doctoral candidate in the Joint Clinical-Community Psychology program with a Rural Indigenous Emphasis. Furthermore, I am also aware that you are interested in submitting a proposal to the UAA Institutional Review Board for a project focusing specifically on Alaska Native students at UAA.

The therapeutic effectiveness of talking circles used among Alaska Native Peoples remains unexplored through scientific research. However, elders including myself believe that the circle was a common practice of communication among our ancestors. Moreover, scientific or scholarly literature regarding the use of Talking Circles among Alaska Native people is scarce. Therefore, supporting the need for an empirical investigation of the potential benefits of the circle among Alaska Native Peoples is essential. In efforts to condense such a substantial investigation and to create a foundation for future research on the overall effectiveness of talking circles as a whole, I recognize that you will focus specifically on adjustment to college life with Alaska Native students.

Our students are the future and it is our responsibility to invest in supporting their success. I believe that your project can be beneficial to Alaska Native students and such research may potentially help students transitioning from rural communities with adjustment to college life. Furthermore, I would like to support your project and application to the Institutional Review Board to include key informant interviews with myself regarding the therapeutic effectiveness, utility and process of talking circles used among Alaska Native Peoples.

Sincerely,

Rita Blumenstein, Yupik Tribal Doctor
Program Manager—Native Ways of Knowing
Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium